



JOHN A. SEAVERNS

AN IRISH COUSIN.

BY

GEILLES HERRING AND MARTIN ROSS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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AN IRISH COUSIN.

PART II.

THE COST OF IT.

(Continued.)

CHAPTER II.

SUPPER EXTRAS.

“All night has the casement jessamine stirred
To the dancers dancing in tune.”

“Must you go?”

That cousin here again? He waits outside?”

WE were at supper. The chaperons had at length completed their well-earned repast, and had returned, flushed and loquacious, to the dancing-room, yielding

their places to the hungry throng who had been waiting outside the door.

The last waltz had been played by Miss Sissie Croly, in good time and with considerable spirit, an act of coquettish self-abnegation which elicited many tender reproaches from her forsaken partner. Making the most of the temporary improvement in the music, Nugent and I had danced without stopping, until a series of sensational flourishes announced that the end of the waltz was at hand. After it was over, he had suggested supper, and we had secured a small table at the end of the supper-room, from which, in comparative quiet, we could view the doings of the rest of the company. I was guiltily conscious of the large "W" scrawled across the supper extras on my card; but a latent rebellion against my cousin's unauthorized appropriation conspired with a

distinct desire for food to harden my heart. I made up my mind to do what seemed good to me about one at least of the extras, and dismissed for the present all further thought of Willy and his possible grievances.

I found myself possessed of an excellent appetite. Nugent's invention as a caterer soared above the usual chicken and jelly, and we both made what, in the land of my birth, would be described as a "square meal."

Meanwhile, the centre table was surrounded by what looked like a convivial party of lunatics. Miss Burke and Dr. Kelly had set the example of decorating themselves with the coloured paper caps contained in the crackers, and the other guests had instantly adopted the idea. Mob-caps, night-caps, fools'-caps, and sun-bonnets nodded in nightmare array round

the table, Miss Burke's long red face showing to great advantage beneath a pale-blue, tissue-paper tall hat.

"I feel I have been very remiss in not offering to pull a cracker with you," said Nugent, "but I am afraid they have all been used up by this time!"

"Why did I not go in to supper with Dr. Kelly?" I said regretfully. "If the worst came to the worst, I am sure he would have taken off his own sun-bonnet and put it on my head!"

"Go in with him next time," suggested Nugent. "He always goes in to supper two or three times, and works his way each time down the table like a mowing-machine, leaving nothing behind him. At the masonic ball in Cork he was heard saying to his sisters, as they were going in to supper, 'Stuff, ye divils! there's ice!'"

“Quite right, too,” I said, beginning upon the tipsy cake which Nugent had looted for our private consumption. “I always make a point of stuffing when there is ice. However, I think on the whole I have had enough of Dr. Kelly for one evening. I have danced once with him, and I suppose it is because he is at least a foot shorter than I am that he makes himself about half his height when he is dancing with me. But I think all small men do that; the taller their partner, the more they bend their knees.”

Nugent laughed. “I have been watching you dancing with all sorts and conditions of men, and wondering what you thought of them. I also wondered if you would find them sufficiently amusing to induce you to stay on till No. 18?” he said, putting his elbows on the table and looking questioningly at me.

“Oh, I hope so—at least—of course, that depends on your mother,” I answered.

“Should you care to stay? As in that case I think I could manage to square my mother.”

“It would be better not to bother her about it, perhaps—of course, it might be very pleasant to stay,” I answered confusedly.

The way in which he had asked the question had given me a strange sensation for a moment.

“I dare say it is not any argument, but I shall be very sorry if you go.”

I went on with the buttoning of my gloves without answering.

“For one reason, I should like you to see what it gets like towards the end.”

Nugent’s eyes were fixed on mine across the intervening woodcock and tipsy cake with more inquiry than seemed necessary,

but as he finished speaking a little troop of men came in together for a supplementary supper, and I forgot everything but my own guilty conscience, as among them I saw Willy. It was, however, evident that he had not come with any gluttonous intent, for, after a cursory look round the room over people's heads, he walked out.

"Did you see Willy?" I said, in a scared whisper.

"Yes, perfectly. He was probably looking for you."

"Oh, I know he was!" I said, beginning to gather up my fan and other belongings. "I ought to go at once. I am engaged to him for the extras."

"Are you afraid of Willy?" returned Nugent, without taking his elbows off the table, or making any move.

"No, of course I'm not. But I don't like to throw him over."

“Oh, I see!” he said, still without moving, and regarding me with an aggravating amusement.

“Well, *I* am going——” I began, when a hand was laid on my arm.

“I am delighted to hear it,” said Connie’s voice, “as we want this table. Get up, Nugent, and give me your chair. Nothing would induce me to sit at that bear-garden” —indicating the larger table. “What do you think I heard Miss Donovan say to that little Beamish man—English Tommy—as I was making my way up here? ‘Now, captain, if you say that again, I’ll pelt my plate of jelly at you!’ And I haven’t the least doubt that at this moment his shirt-front is covered with it.”

“Oh, all right,” said Nugent, slowly getting up, “you can have this table; we were just going. Miss Sarsfield is very anxious to find Willy. She says she

is going to dance all the extras with him."

"Then she is rather late," replied Connie, unconcernedly. "Captain Forster, go *at once* and get me some game-pie. Don't tell me there's none; I couldn't bear it. Well, my dear," she continued, "perhaps you are not aware that the extras are all over, and No. 12 is going on now?"

"Have you seen Willy anywhere?" I asked, feeling rather than seeing the sisterly eye of facetious insinuation that Connie directed at her brother. "I am engaged to him for No. 12."

"At this moment he is dancing with Miss Dennehy," answered Connie, "but I know he has been looking for you. He has prowled in and out of the conservatory twenty times."

"He was in here too," said Nugent; "and I think he saw you," he added, as

we walked into the hall. "What would you like to do now? Willy has evidently thrown you over, and I expect my partner has consoled herself. I think the safest plan is to hide somewhere till this is over, and, as 13 is ours, we can then emerge, and dance it with blameless composure."

The doors of the conservatory at the end of the hall stood invitingly open, and a cool, fragrant waft of perfume came through them. Without further deliberation, we mutely accepted their invitation, and finding, by the dim, parti-coloured light of Chinese lanterns, that two armchairs had been placed at the further end, we immediately took possession of them.

"Occasionally rest is vouchsafed even to the wicked," said Nugent, leaning back, and picking up my fan, which I had laid on the floor, and beginning lazily to examine it. "Looking at a ball in the

abstract, I think it involves great weariness and vexation of spirit. Out of twenty-four dances, there are at most four or five that one really looks forward to. You *are* going to stay for No. 18, you know," he added quietly. "I shall settle that with the Madam."

"Give me my fan, please," I said, taking no notice of this assertion. "I can see you know just the right way to break it."

He sat up, and, instead of returning it, began slowly to fan me. There was a brief silence. The rain pattered down on the glass overhead. We could just hear the music, and the measured stamping of the dancers' feet.

"Do you know," he said suddenly, "you are curiously different from what I expected you to be."

"Why? Had you formed any definite idea about me?"

“Not in the least. That was what threw me so out of my reckoning. I thought I knew pretty well, in a general way, what you were going to be like; but somehow you have made me reconstruct all my notions.”

“If you had only told me in time, I should have tried to be less inconsiderate. It is so painful to have to give up one’s ideas.”

“I did not find it so,” he said seriously; “on the contrary. I wonder”—continuing to flap my big black fan to and fro—“if you ever had a kind of latent ideal—a sort of thing which seems so impossible that you never try to form any very concrete theory about it? I suppose it very seldom happens to a man to find that an idea he has only dreamt about is a real thing after all. Can you imagine what an effect it would have upon him when he found

that he had unexpectedly met his—well, his ideal?”

He folded up the fan, and looked down at me, waiting for an answer.

“I should imagine he would think himself very clever,” I said, feeling rather nervous.

“No, not clever, I don’t think, so much as fortunate; that is to say”—he drew a short breath—“of course the ideal may have ideas of her—of its own that the man can’t live up to—independent schemes, in fact; and then—why, then that chap gets left, you know,” he ended, with a change of tone.

As he finished speaking, the far-off banging of the piano ceased. I did not know how to reply to what he had said, and his way of saying it had made me feel so shy and bewildered that I sat awkwardly silent until the dancers came crowding into

the conservatory, all in turn exhibiting the same resentful surprise, as they found the only two chairs occupied. Willy was not among them, nor did I see him during the ensuing dance, and, as his late partner was in the room, I could only conclude that he was sitting out by himself. I began to feel uncomfortable about him, and half dreaded meeting him again. The dance seemed interminably long. I kept my eyes fixed on the door to see if he were among the string of black and red-coated men who wandered partnerless in and out, but could see no sign of him. I have no doubt that under these circumstances I was a very uninteresting companion; Nugent was also silent and preoccupied, and I think we were both glad when the dance was over.

“It is very strange that I do not see Willy anywhere,” I said, as we came out into the hall again.

“Who? Oh! Willy,” he said. “Are you still looking for him? Is not that he coming out of the supper-room?”

It *was* Willy. I dropped Nugent’s arm.

“You will excuse me, won’t you?” I said hurriedly. “I want to explain to him——”

By this time Willy had met us, and looked as if he were going to pass me by.

“Do you know that this is our dance?” I said, stopping him. “You are not going to throw me over again, are you?” My heart beat rather fast as I made this feeble endeavour to carry the war into the enemy’s country. He was looking grey and ill, and I did not think that his pleasant, boyish face could have taken on such an expression of gloomy coldness.

“Really? Is it? I did not know that I was to have the honour of dancing with you again,” he responded, with a boyish attempt at frigid dignity.

“Of course it is,” I said cheerily, though I felt rather alarmed. “Look at it in black and white.”

Willy did not look at the card which I held towards him.

“It doesn’t appear that my name being written there makes much difference,” he answered, making a movement as if to pass on.

“Oh, Willy, that isn’t fair! You know I danced ever so often with you before supper, and afterwards I was looking for you everywhere; was I not, Mr. O’Neill?” —turning for corroboration to Nugent. He, however, had left me to fight my own battles, and was at a little distance, deep in conversation with Mr. Dennehy. I saw that, whether verified or not, my explanations had but little effect upon Willy, and I boldly assumed the offensive. “You know, I never said that I was going to

give you all those dances that you took."

"Of course you were at perfect liberty to do what you liked about them," returned Willy, without looking at me.

"Don't be absurd! You know quite well what I mean, and if you had wanted to dance with me you might very easily have found me. I was only in the supper-room."

He said nothing, and just then we heard the first few notes of the next waltz.

"You *will* dance this with me, will not you?" I said, thoroughly unhappy at the turn things were taking. "I am very sorry. I did not think you would mind. Don't be angry with me, Willy," I ended impulsively, putting my hand into his arm.

He looked at me almost wildly for a moment; and then, without a word, we joined the stream of dancers who were returning to the ball-room.



CHAPTER III.

MR. CROLY'S STUDY.

"Love the gift, is love the debt."

"Like bitter accusation, even to death,
Caught up the whole of love, and uttered it."

MRS. JACKSON-CROLY'S party had reached its climax of success.

"The supper's put great heart into them," little Dr. Kelly remarked confidentially to Willy, as he passed us, leading a stout elderly matron forth to the dance. The chaperons, with but few exceptions, had abandoned the hard chairs and narrow sofas on which they had hitherto huddled in chilly discomfort, and were,

again to quote Dr. Kelly, "footing it with the best of them."

Mrs. Croly herself was playing "Sweet-hearts," and by way, as I suppose, of receiving this favour with proper enthusiasm, the guests, as they danced, sang the words of the refrain—

"Oh, lo—*ove* for a year,
A we—*eeek*, a day,"

as often as it recurred, Mrs. Croly from the piano lending her powerful aid to swell the chorus. Madam O'Neill was sitting alone upon her sofa, and had closed her eyes during this later development of the entertainment, whether in real or simulated slumber I did not know; but an expressive glance from Connie, whom, to my surprise, I saw circling in the arms of our host, told me that the latter was more probably the case. The O'Neill I had lately espied sitting in an armchair on the landing of the stairs

with a very pretty young lady, the instructress of the younger Misses Jackson-Croly. He, at all events, was enjoying himself, and as far as he was concerned I felt none of the qualms of conscience at the lateness of the hour which assailed me at sight of my chaperon's tired face.

Willy had not spoken since we had begun to dance, but I thought it best to behave as if nothing were the matter.

"This is the most amusing dance I ever was at in my life," I said, in the first pause that we made.

"I don't see much difference between it and any other."

"I do not mean to say that I have not enjoyed myself," I said, anxious to avoid any semblance of superiority, "but you must admit that one does not usually meet people who are able to sing and dance a waltz at the same time."

At this point there came a sudden thud on the floor, followed by a slight commotion.

“Hullo! Croly’s let Connie down!” exclaimed Willy, forgetting for an instant his offended dignity.

I was just in time to catch between the dancers a glimpse of Connie struggling, hot and angry, to her feet, while her partner lay prone on his back on the floor. The catastrophe had taken place just in front of Madam O’Neill, whose eyes, now wide open, were bent in a gaze of petrified indignation on Mr. Jackson-Croly. Nugent had not been dancing, and, on seeing Connie fall, had gone round to pick her up, and now made his way towards me.

“Did you see them come down?” he said. “Croly hung on to Connie like a drowning man to a straw, and Connie, not being exactly a straw, nearly drove his head into the floor. She won’t speak to

him now, which is rather hard luck, considering she all but killed him. Was I not right in advising you to stay on till the end ? ”

Exceeding laughter had deprived me of all power of speech, but, in any case, Willy did not give me time to reply.

“ Come out of this,” he said roughly ; “ I’m sick of it.” He gave me his arm as he spoke, and elbowed his way past Nugent out of the room. He walked without speaking through the hall towards the conservatory, but stopped short at the door. “ It’s full of people in there. Croly’s study’s the only place where you’ve a chance of being let alone,” he said, turning down a passage, and leading the way into a dreary little room, lighted by a smoky paraffin-lamp, and pervaded by the odour of whiskey. On the inky table, two or three tumblers with spoons in them, and a bottle

and decanter, were standing in shining patches of spilt whiskey and water. A few office chairs were drawn up in front of the remains of a smouldering turf fire. Long files of bills hung beside an old coat on some pegs, and Mr. Croly's cloth slippers showed modestly from under a small horse-hair sofa. A more untempting place to sit in could not well be imagined; but Willy did not seem to notice its discomforts. He sat down on one of the chairs, and began aimlessly to poke the fire; while I, gingerly drawing my skirts together, established myself on the sofa.

"I can't say I think this is an improvement on the conservatory," I said at length, seeing that Willy did not seem inclined to talk. "When did you discover it?"

He threw down the poker, and, standing up, began to examine a specimen of ore that lay on the chimney-piece.

“If you want to know particularly,” he said, in a hard and would-be indifferent voice, “I came and sat in here by myself while those extras were going on.”

“That wasn’t a very cheerful thing to do.”

“Well, I didn’t feel very cheerful,” he answered, still with his back to me, and beginning to scrape the marble mantelshelf with the piece of ore which he held in his hand.

“Some one appears to have found a certain solace here,” I said, looking at the whiskey and water. “I am sure poor Mr. Croly has crept in from time to time, and put on his old coat and slippers, and tried to forget that there was a dance going on in his house.”

No answer from Willy.

“Then perhaps it was *you*,” I continued, with ill-assumed levity. “I am sorry to

think that you have taken to such evil courses."

He went on hammering at the chimney-piece without replying.

"It's very rude of you not to answer; and you are ruining Mr. Croly's mantel-piece."

He put down the piece of ore suddenly, and, leaving the fireplace, came and stood over me.

"Theo!" he said, in a breathless sort of way, and stopped. I looked up at him with quick alarm, and saw that he was trying to get mastery enough over himself to speak. "Don't look at me like that," he said, almost in a whisper. "I'm nearly mad as it is. I can't bear it any longer; I must say it."

"Don't, Willy," I said; "please don't. It would be better for us both if you didn't."

"I don't care," he said, kneeling down beside me, and taking hold of both my hands. "You've got to listen to me now. You needn't think that I don't know I haven't a chance. I've seen that plain enough to-night, if I didn't know it before. Oh, I know, Theo; I know very well," he ended brokenly.

I could find nothing to say. I liked him so much that I could not bring myself to frame the bitter truth which he would have to hear. I suppose my silence encouraged him, for in the same breathless, abrupt way he went on.

"I know I'm an ignorant brute; but if you would only just try me. Oh, Theo, if you could only know! I'm such a fool I can't get hold of the right words to tell you, but you might believe me all the same. Indeed I do love you—I love you," he repeated, with a sort of sob, gathering

both my hands into one of his and kissing them passionately.

"Willy," I said despairingly, trying to free my hands from his grasp, "you must stop; you make me miserable. I can't bear to hear you talk like that. You know how much I like you and respect you, and everything. I am fonder of you than any one I know almost, but not in that way."

"But if you were fond of me at all, I wouldn't mind how little you liked me at first, if you'd let me care for you. Maybe, it would come to you afterwards; and you know the governor would like it awfully," said the poor boy, lifting his white face, and gazing at me with desperate eyes.

"It's no use, Willy; I can't let you say any more about it. I'm not worth your caring for me like that," I said unsteadily.

His hands relaxed their grasp, and, drawing mine away, I stood up. He got

up also, and stood facing me in the smoky light of the lamp. He leaned his hand on the table beside him, and a little ringing of the spoons and glasses told me how it trembled. When he next spoke, however, his voice was firmer.

“That’s no answer. You’re worth more to me than everything in the world. If it was only *that*”—with a shaky laugh—“but I know that’s not your reason. Look here—will you tell me one thing?”—coming closer, and staring hard at me. “Is it another fellow? Is it—is it Nugent?”

“It is nothing of the kind,” I said angrily, but at the same time flushing hotly under his scrutiny. “You have no right to say such things. If I had never seen him, I should feel just the same towards you.”

I turned to take my bouquet from the sofa with the intention of leaving the

room, but before I could do so, Willy snatched it up, and, taking a stride forward, he flung the flowers into the fire, and crushed them with his foot into the burning embers.

“How dare you, Willy!” I said, thoroughly roused. “What right had you to do that?”

“And what right have *you* to say you don't care for him, when you carry his cursed flowers in your hand? I see how the land lies well enough. I've been made a fool of all through!”

“You have not been made a fool of,” I said, with equal energy. “It is cruel of you to say that.”

“Cruel? It comes well from you to say that! I dare say you think it doesn't matter much; but maybe some day, when I've gone to the devil, you'll be sorry.”

He walked to the door, as if to go.

“I *am* sorry, Willy,” I said, the tears rushing to my eyes. “Don’t go away like that. Oh, why did I ever come to Durrus?”

He stood irresolute for a moment, with the handle of the door in his hand, looking at me as if in a daze. Then, with an inarticulate exclamation, he came back to where I was standing, and, before I had time to stop him, took me in his arms. I was too much unstrung and exhausted by what had gone before to resist, and I stood in a kind of horror of passive endurance while he kissed me over and over again. He let me go at last.

“It’s no use,” he said, in a choked voice, which sounded almost like a groan; “it’s no use. My God! I can’t bear it!” His eye fell on the bunch of violets in my dress. “Give them to me,” he said.

I silently took out of my dress the bunch

he had given me, and handed them, all limp and faded, to him. He took them without looking at me, and, turning his back to me, walked to the chimney-piece. He leaned both his arms upon the narrow shelf, and laid his head upon them.

When I left the room, he was still standing motionless in the same position.





CHAPTER IV.

MYROSS CHURCHYARD.

“O fair, large day!
The unpractised sense brings heavings from a sea of
life too broad.”

“Such seemed the whisper at my side.
‘What is it thou knowest, sweet voice?’ I cried.
‘A hidden hope,’ the voice replied.”

THE old graveyard on the promontory was at most times the forlornest and least frequented spot about Durrus. The dead people who lay in crowded slumber within the narrow limits of the grey, briar-covered walls seldom heard any disturbing human voice to remind them of the life they had left. Their solitude was ensured to them

by the greater solitude of the sea, which on three sides surrounded them, and by the dreary strip of worn-out turf bog which formed their only link with the rest of the world. There was nothing to mark for them the passing of time, except the creeping of the shadow thrown dial-wise by the gable of the broken-down chapel, or the ever-increasing moaning in the caves beneath, which told of the yearly encroachments of the sea.

Between the verge of the cliff and the wall of the graveyard was only a little space, along which the sheep had worn themselves a track among the thickly lying shells and *débris*, flung up by the waves during autumn storms. I had wandered round this narrow path, holding with a careful hand to the wall as I went; and now had clambered on to it, and, with Pat seated in my lap and Jinny on the tail

of my gown, I was watching the quick dives and casual reappearances of the slim black cormorants in the sunlit water beneath me. The murmur of the sea, lightly lipping the rocks, and an occasional bleat from the sheep in the graveyard behind me, were the only definite sounds I heard, and the soft wind that rustled in my ears in little gusts seemed the expression of the pervading stillness.

This delicate breezy morning was the first of the new year. Yesterday's sunset had been a wild one; it had gleamed angrily and fitfully before me through packs of jagged cloud while I drove home from Clashmore, and my heart had sunk low as I watched the outlines of Durrus growing darker against it. But that was already a thing of last year. The long uneventful darkness had made everything new, and on this first of January the sun-

shine was lying purely and dreamily on sea and bog, and was even giving something like warmth to the head-stones, whose worn "Anno Dominis" were since yesterday more remote by a year.

It was a desire for this freedom and freshness which had driven me out of the house on this, the second morning after the dance at Mount Prospect. When I came back to Durrus the evening before, I had found the house empty and desolate. Willy was not there; he had gone to Cork, Uncle Dominick had told me, looking at me, as he spoke, with a questioning glance that showed me his anxiety to know if I could account for this unexpected move.

All the morning at Clashmore, the thought of the inevitable meeting with Willy had hung over me. It had made me absent during a lesson at billiards, and

stupid in a violin accompaniment; and, combining with the guilt which I felt at enjoying myself, as, in spite of what had happened, I could not help doing, it had made me unnecessarily and awkwardly determined in refusing several invitations to stay on. As I sat beside Nugent in the dog-cart on the way home, and felt that every step of the horse was bringing me nearer to Willy, I had become silent in the attempt to nerve myself for the dreaded first few minutes. If I could struggle through them creditably, things might not afterwards be so bad. I think Nugent must have seen that something was troubling me. Having told me that he was afraid I was very much done up by the dance, he had considerately left me to myself, and scarcely spoke until we were at the Durrus hall door—an act of thoughtfulness for which I could almost have

thanked him. He refused my invitation to come in to tea—an invitation so faintly given that he could hardly have accepted it—but asked if he might come over some other afternoon, perhaps the day after to-morrow, and with an excuse for not coming in, which he had obviously fabricated to help me out of the difficulty, he had driven away.

My first question to Roche as the hall door closed behind me, was to know where Willy was. He was away; he had gone to Cork the day after the dance, and it was uncertain when he would be at home. Then, I might have stayed at Clashmore after all—that, I am afraid, was my first thought; and then came the feeling of blank collapse, the blending of relief and disappointment, which is the usual result of needless mental strain. I had for an instant an insane desire to run down the

avenue after the dog-cart, and say that I would go back to Clashmore; that there was no reason now—— I laughed drearily to myself as I took off my wraps. What would Nugent have said when I had overtaken him with such an excuse? It amused me to think of it; but yet, I thought, I should have liked to have known.

The restlessness of over-fatigue and excitement was upon me. I did not know how to endure the long dull dinner, and the solitary evening which followed it. I tried to play the piano, but the tunes of the waltzes of the night before still rang in my ears, and the unresponsive silence of the room as I ceased was too daunting to be faced a second time. Between my eyes and the columns of the newspaper came a vision of Mr. Croly's dark little room, and my tired brain kept continually framing

sentences which might have averted all that had taken place there. I could not even think connectedly, and finally went to bed, as lonely and miserable as I have ever felt in my life.

In the morning my thoughts had confusedly shaped themselves into one problem. Would it be possible to go on staying at Durrus? Half the morning had slipped away, and I had still found no answer to the question. My head ached, and I felt I could come to no decision until I was, for the present at least, out of the depressing atmosphere of the house.

I put the perplexing subject away from me in my half-hour's walk across the bog, and thought of the dogs, the seagulls, the patches of white cloud and blue sky that seemed so out of place reflected in the black pools by the side of the road—of anything, in fact, rather than the difficulty

which was troubling me. I thought that when I got to the edge of the cliffs, with nothing but the open sea before me, I should be able to take a steadier view of the whole position.

But I had been sitting in perfect tranquillity for half an hour, and yet no inspiration had been brought to me on the breath of the west wind that was coming softly over the sea from America. "I suppose I ought to go back to Aunt Jane," was my last, as it had been my first, thought; "but it will be very hard to have to leave Ireland. Besides, if I go away now, Willy will think that I am going out of kindness to him, and I could not bear that."

Here Pat, who had found the distant observation of the cormorants a very tantalizing amusement, looked up in my face with a whimpering sigh, and curled him-

self up with his head on my arm and his back to the sea. As I stooped over and kissed his little white and tan head, a crowd of insistent memories rushed into my mind. In every one Willy's was the leading figure; his look, his laugh, his voice pervaded them all, but with a new meaning that made pathos of the pleasantest of them. I wondered, with perhaps a little insincerity, why I had not liked him as well as he liked me. He had said that, if I were to try, I might some day; but though I should have been glad for his sake to believe it, every feeling in me rose in sudden revolt at the idea with a violence that astonished myself. "We shall never have any good times again," I thought. "I suppose he is miserable now, and it is all my fault. Oh, Willy! I never meant to be unkind to you." I ended, almost aloud, and the bright reaches of sea quivered and

dazzled in my eyes as the painful tears gathered and fell.

I have always found that tears rather intensify a trouble than lessen it, and they now gave such keen reality to what I was feeling that I could bear the pressure of my thoughts no longer. I got up quickly to go home, and as I turned I saw a string of three or four boats heading for the little strand at the foot of the cliff, just below where I was standing. They were the cumbrous rowing-boats generally used for carrying turf, and came heavily on through the bright restless water, loaded, as well as I could see, with men and women.

The pounding and creaking of the clumsy oars in the rowlocks grew louder ; I was soon able to make out that the long dark object, round which several figures were clustered in the leading boat, was a

coffin, and I now remembered Willy's having told me that this little cove was called "Tra-na-morruf," the strand of the dead, from the fact that it was the landing-place for such funerals as came by boat to the old burying-place. The people were quite silent as the boats slowly advanced to the shore; but directly the keel of the first touched on the shingle, the women in the others raised a sustained, penetrating wail, which vibrated in the sunny air, and made me shiver in involuntary sympathy.

I thought I had never heard so terrible a cry. I had often been told of the Irish custom of "keening" at funerals, but I was not prepared for anything so barbaric and so despairing. It broke out with increasing volume and intensity while the coffin was being lifted from the boat and was toilfully carried up the steep path in the cliff, the women clapping their hands and

beating their breasts, their chant rising and swelling like the howl of the wind on a wild night. The small procession halted at the top of the cliff, and another set of bearers took the coffin, and carried it with staggering steps across the irregular mounds of the graveyard, to where, behind the ruined chapel, I now noticed, for the first time, an open grave. The dark crowd closed in round it, and, after a few stifled sobs and exclamations, I heard nothing but the shovelling of the earth upon the coffin.

It was soon over. The throng of heavily cloaked women and frieze-coated men opened out, and I saw the long mound of brown earth, with a couple of women and a man kneeling beside it. The rest, for the most part, made their way down the cliff to the strand, from which a clatter of conversation soon ascended. About half a dozen of the women, however, remained

behind; each sought out some special grave, and, kneeling there, began to tell her beads and pray with seemingly deep devotion.

I moved away from where I had been standing, with the intention of going home, but stopped at the gateway to look again at the effect of the black figures dotted about among the grey stones, with their background of pale blue sky. Near the gate was the ugly squat mausoleum in which lay many generations of Sarsfields, and as I passed through the gate I saw, kneeling at the farther side of it, a mourner dressed like the others in a hooded blue cloak. She was clapping her hands and beating her breast as if keening, but she made no sound. A country woman at this moment passed me, curtsying as she did so, and, feeling a natural curiosity to know who had taken upon

herself the office of bewailing my ancestors, I said—

“Can you tell me who that woman at the Sarsfield tomb is?”

“Faith, then, I can, your honour, miss! But sure yourself should know her as well as me. ’Tis Moll Hourihane, that lives below at the lodge of the big house.”

“Oh yes, of course, so it is,” I said, recognizing her as I spoke; “but what has she come here for?”

“Throth, I dunno, miss. But there’s never a buryin’ here that she’s not at it, and that’s the spot where she’ll always post herself. Sure she’s idiotty-like; she thinks she’s keening there, and the divil a screech out of her, good or bad, all the time.”

My informant gave a short laugh. She was a tall, handsome woman, with a strong Spanish type of face and daring black eyes, and she had a grimly humorous manner which interested and amused me.

“Why does she pick out the Durrus tomb?” I asked, as much to continue the conversation as for any other reason.

“Glory be to God, miss! How would I know?”—darting at me, however, a look of extreme intelligence, combined with speculation as to the extent of my ignorance. “’Twas she laid out the owld masther afther he dying, whativer—yis, an’ young Mrs. Dominick too. Though, fegs! the sayin’ is, she cried more for her whin she was alive than whin she was dead.”

We were walking slowly along the uneven bog road towards Durrus, my companion trudging sociably beside me, with her hood thrown back from her coarse black hair.

“What do you mean?” I said, hoping to hear at last something of the origin of Moll’s madness.

“There’s many a wan would cry if they got the turn out,” she responded oracularly.

“Why, what was she turned out of?” I asked.

“Out of the big house, sure! ’Twas there she was till the young misthriss came.”

“I suppose she was a servant there?”

She gave a loud laugh. “Och! ’twasn’t thrusting to being a servant at all she was! Mr. Dominick got her wan time to tend the owld masther that was sick three years before he died, and the like o’ that; and ’twas there she stayed till Mr. Dominick got marri’d, and then, faith, she had to quit.”

I was rather puzzled.

“I suppose Mrs. Sarsfield liked to choose her servants for herself.”

The woman gave a derisive snort. “It ’ud be a quare thing if she’d choose *her*

whatever!" she said. "Annyway, she never came next or nigh the house till after Mrs. Dominick dyin', and thin she was took back to mind the owld masther and Masther Willy."

"But I thought she was weak in her head?"

"Och! the divil a fear! She was as cute as a pet fox till the winther the owld masther died; but whativer came agin her thin I don't rightly know. 'Twas about the time she marri'd owld Michael Brian it began with her. She looked cliver enough; but the spaych mostly wint from her, and she was a year that way." Here she looked behind her, and crossed herself with a start. "The saints be about us!" she exclaimed, in a whisper; "look at herself follying us!"

I also turned, and saw Moll Hourihane close behind. She was walking on the

strip of grass by the side of the road, and, without looking at us, she passed by, moving with a sliding shuffle, which I can only compare to the rolling action of an elephant. She shambled along in front of us until she came near the gate in the Durrus avenue, when, turning aside into the bog, she made her way across it to a large black pit filled with water, apparently one of the many deep holes from which turf had once been dug. Having wardered once or twice round its shelving, ragged edges—perilously near them, it seemed to me—she knelt down at its verge, and, folding her hands on her breast, as she had done on the first night I had seen her, she remained there without moving.

“Look at her now,” said my companion, superstitiously, “saying her prayers there down by Poul-na-coppal, as if ’twas before the althar she was. Faith, whin she had

her sinses she wasn't so great at her prayers !”

“I don't think it is very safe to let her go to a place like that,” I said. “I suppose that hole is deep enough to drown her.”

“Is it Poul-na-coppal? Shure, it's the greatest shwallow-hole in the country! Shure, wasn't it there a fine young horse fell down in it wan time, and they niver seen the sight of him agin? There's no bottom in it, only mud. Throth, if she got in there, she'd be bound to stay there; and 'twould be a good job too—God forgive me for sayin' such a thing!”

“Don't you think we ought to try and get her away from there?” I said, still watching Moll with a kind of fascination, as she rocked herself to and fro close to the edge.

“Wisha, thin, I'd be in dhread to go

near her at all. Shure, there's times when she wouldn't be said nor led by her own daughther."

"It was after Anstey was born that she went completely out of her mind, was it not?" I said, as we walked on.

"Well, 'twas thin the sinse left her entirely, miss; but she wasn't all out right in her head, as I'm tellin' ye, for a year before that. There was a big snow came afther the little gerr'l was born, and they say, whin she seen that she let one bawl out of her, and niver spoke a word afther."

We had by this time come to the little gate that led out of the bog.

"Good evening to your honour, miss. May the Lord comfort your honour long, and that I may niver die till I see you well married; for you're a fine young lady, God bless you!"—with which comprehensive benediction, Mary Minnahane,

as I afterwards found was her name, tramped off down the avenue.

I felt lonelier for the cessation of her rough, vigorous voice; and, turning, I leaned on the gate, and looked back over the sunshiny bleakness of the bog. It looked now very much as it had looked on the day when I had gone out to see Willy put Alaska through her paces, and as the fragrant wind brought the sea murmurs to me, I almost cheated myself into the belief that this was still that brilliant October afternoon, and that Willy was now riding down to meet me at the lodge.

My eyes fell on the solitary figure at the bog hole. It recalled in a moment the funeral, the graveyard, my futile tears, and all that had led to them. I turned towards home with the same feeling of uncertainty and dejection with which I had set out.



CHAPTER V.

ENTER WILLY.

“ Oh, the little more, and how much it is !
And the little less, and what worlds away ! ”

“ Love with bent brows went by,
And with a flying finger swept my lips.”

“ No news from Willy ? I thought *you* would have been sure to have heard from him.”

“ No, Uncle Dominick ; he never even told me he was going,” I replied, with a full consciousness of the emphasis laid on the “ you.”

“ Really ! How very strange ! I thought Master Willy seldom did anything nowa-

days without consulting a certain young lady.”

I went on with my lunch without speaking. These pleasantries on my uncle's part were not uncommon, and, as there was no mistaking whither they all tended, I hated and dreaded them more every day. In this particular instance, I believed I saw very plainly a real anxiety to find out the state of affairs between Willy and me, and I thought it best to hold my tongue. My silence did not discourage Uncle Dominick.

“I forgot to tell you last night that I met Miss Burke yesterday,” he said. “She gave me a great deal of news about the ball, and told me that every one said that you and Willy were ‘the handsomest couple in the room.’ I told her that as far as one of you was concerned I could well believe it; and, indeed, Willy is not such a bad-looking fellow, after all, eh?”

“I think Miss Burke herself and Willy were a much more striking pair,” I answered, evading the question, and anxious to show him that I disliked the way in which I was for ever bracketed with Willy. “Oh, by the way, Uncle Dominick,” I went on, regardless of a conviction that I was saying the wrong thing, “I heard from Mr. O’Neill this morning. He says that he is coming over here this afternoon, to fetch some music which he left here the other day.”

Uncle Dominick gave me a sharp look from under his bushy eyebrows. It was one of those unguarded glances which, for the moment, strip the face of all conventional disguises, and lay bare all that is hidden of suspicion and surmise. I noticed suddenly how bloodshot his eyes were, and how very pale he was looking. There was dead silence. By way of appearing un-

conscious and indifferent, I took out of my pocket Nugent's letter, and began to read it; but I felt in every fibre that my uncle was watching me, and a maddening blush slowly mounted to my forehead, and spread itself even to the tips of my ears. Uncle Dominick cleared his throat with ominous severity, and pushed back his chair from the table.

“At what hour do you expect Mr. O'Neill?”

If he had asked me at what time in the afternoon I contemplated committing a burglary, he could not have spoken with a more concentrated disapproval.

“I have not the least idea,” I said, getting up with as much dignity as I could muster. “I suppose about the time people usually come.”

“H'm! I suppose one cannot expect young ladies to be very lucid in their

statements about such matters," he replied, with a singularly unpleasant smile.

"I suppose not," I retorted obstinately.

"Well, I suppose one must only expect him when he comes," said my uncle, with a return of suavity, as distasteful to me as his former manner. I called the dogs away from their assiduous polishing of the plates on which they had had their dinners, and left him to finish his wine alone.

"How detestable he can be when he likes!" I thought, seating myself before the drawing-room fire. "I wonder why he dislikes Nugent so much? I don't suppose it can be on account of Willy; after all, there is really no reason for that." My cheeks were still hot, and I put my hands over them, looking through my fingers into the fire. "If Uncle Dominick is going to make himself unpleasant in this kind of way, I shall have to go back to

America, no matter what Willy thinks about it."

My ideas as to leaving Durrus were still as hazy as they had been yesterday morning at the old graveyard, and this was a fresh complication. I had, however, made up my mind on one point—until I saw Willy again, I would settle nothing. That was at least definite; and so was the fact which at this moment occurred to me—that I should break down in one of the more difficult of the violin accompaniments if I did not practise it before Nugent came. I gave the fire an impatient poke, and, mentally throwing my reflections into it, went over to the piano.

I had said to my uncle that I supposed Nugent would come at the usual time, but I was forced to the conclusion that his views on the subject differed from those of most people. Teatime came, and, after

waiting till the tea was becoming bitter, and the buttered toast half congealed, I partook of it in solitude. I began to wonder if it were possible that he could have made a mistake about the day, and again taking out his letter, I read it over. The clear, forcible handwriting was not that of a person who made mistakes, and it set forth plainly the fact that on this afternoon the writer intended to come and see me, and would come as early as he could. The sprawling minute-hand of the ormolu clock was now well on its way towards half-past five; something must have happened to prevent him from coming, unless, indeed, he had forgotten all about it. I did not think it likely that he would forget, but the possibility was not a pleasant one. I sat in the cheery light of the fire until the minute-hand had passed the illegibly ornamental figure

which marked the half-hour, and, feeling a good deal more disappointed and put out than I cared to own to myself, I was going to ring for the lamp and settle down to a book, when I heard the sound of quick trotting, and the light run of a dog-cart's wheels on the avenue.

"I know I'm very late," said Nugent, as he shook hands with me, "and I meant to be very early, but it wasn't my fault. I am sure you are going to tell me that the tea is cold, but I don't care; I prefer it with the chill just off."

"Then you will be gratified," I said, pouring it out. "I began to think you were not coming, and was repenting that I had wasted half an hour in practising that awful accompaniment of Braham's."

"Did you really do that? It was very good of you. I did my best to get away early, but I had to stay and see Captain

Forster off. I can't say that he seemed to appreciate the attention, as he was playing billiards with Connie up to the last minute. I was very sorry afterwards that I had been such a fool as to lose the whole afternoon on his account."

"I think you might have left him in Connie's hands," I said, sociably beginning upon a second edition of tea.

"I want to know if you are all right again," said Nugent, looking at me scrutinizingly. "I thought you seemed awfully played out the day before yesterday."

"Did I?" I said. "I wasn't in the least—I mean I was very tired, but that was all."

"You scarcely spoke to me all the way over here. I don't know if you generally treat people like that when you are very tired."

"No," I said; "when I know people well enough, I am simply cross."

“That means that you don’t know me very well.”

“No, I don’t think I do,” I said, with unpremeditated truthfulness. “By the way, is it true that you are all going away from Clashmore soon? You said something about it in your letter.”

“Yes; I believe they are all off next week,” he replied; “but I think I shall stay on here for a bit. I don’t want to go away just now.”

I was on the point of saying that I was very glad to hear he was going to stay, but stopped myself, and said instead that I should have thought he would find it rather dreary by himself.

“I don’t expect I shall,” he answered. “I shall ask you to let me come over here very often. You know, we agreed at Clashmore that you were to take my music in hand, and teach me to count.”

“If I try to do that, we shall certainly have plenty of occupation,” I said, laughing at the prospect with a foolish enjoyment.

“All right, so much the better”—looking at me and laughing too. “By the way, Connie wants to know if you will ride over to Mount Prospect with her and me the day after to-morrow, to pay our respects after the dance.”

“I shall be very glad,” I answered; “I have not had a ride for a long time. Should you mind ringing the bell? We shall want the lamps for the piano.”

“I should mind very much,” he said, without moving from the substantial arm-chair in which he was sitting. “I think it would be a much better scheme to sit over the fire instead. You were in such an extraordinary hurry to get away from Clashmore the day before yesterday, that

you did not give me time for more than half the smart things I had prepared to say about the Jackson-Crollys' dance."

"Very well," I said, dragging out a little old-fashioned, glass-beaded footstool, and settling myself comfortably with my feet on it in front of the fire. "You can begin now, and say them all one after the other, and by the time you have got through I shall have got my smile ready."

"You are very hard upon me. You should remember that my *bon-mots* are exceedingly fragile flowers—kind of hot-house exotics—and they require the most sympathetic attention. You ought to try to encourage native talent, even if it does not come up to your American standard of humour."

"I don't know exactly what that is," I replied ; "but I assure you that that dance does not require any embellishments. The

only thing needful in describing it is the solid truth."

"You must not fancy that all our county Cork entertainments are on the Mount Prospect pattern," he said, a little anxiously. "I dare say you think we are all savages, but we don't often have a war-dance like that."

"Well," I said, checking an inclination to sigh as the thought crossed my mind, "I shall always be glad that I saw at least one before I went back to America."

He got up and put down his cup; then, drawing his unwieldy chair closer to me before sitting down, "But you are not thinking of going back to America?" he said slowly.

"Oh! well, of course I shall have to go back sooner or later," I replied, as airily as I could. "I do not mean to spend my whole life here."

“Don’t you?” he said, in a low voice, leaning forward and trying to intercept my eyes, as I looked straight before me into the fire. “I wish you would tell me if you really mean that.”

“I certainly do mean it,” I answered, with decision. “And, after all, I do not see that it much matters whether I do or not.”

“Why do you say it doesn’t matter?” he said slowly.

“Oh, I don’t know,” I answered idiotically.

“But I think you ought to know before you make assertions of that kind,” he persisted. “I dare say there are several people who would think it mattered a good deal.”

He spoke with an intention in his voice that I had never heard before. My heart gave a startled beat. Did he mean Willy?

“That does not sound at all like what you once said to me. You told me that I was ‘a distinct failure in these parts.’ I should like to know who all these people are who have changed their minds about me,” I said, impelled by a reckless impulse to find out what he had meant.

“Don’t you remember my telling you the other night of one person who had changed his mind? Have you quite forgotten what I said to you then?”

He was very near to me, so near that he must almost have felt my breath as it quickly came and went. My heart was beating fast enough now—hurrying along at such speed that I could not be sure enough of my voice to speak.

“Can you not think of any one to whom it would make a good deal of difference if you went back to America? Couldn’t you?” He hesitated. “Don’t

you know it would make all the difference in the world to—to me ? ”

His hand found mine, and, as it closed upon it, I felt in one magical moment that there was but one hand in the world whose touch could send that strange pang of delight to my heart. His eyes lifted mine to them in spite of me. I do not know what he read in them, but in his I thought I saw something quite new—something that made me giddy, and took away my power of speaking.

“Don’t you know it ? ” he whispered.
“Theo ! ”

With a feeling that I must say something, I answered, scarcely conscious of what I was saying—

“I do not know. I do not see how it could. We see so little of you. Perhaps some people might care. I dare say my uncle and Willy would.”

Nugent got up abruptly, treading inadvertently on Jinny, who was sleeping peacefully on the rug. He took no notice of her resentful shriek, and said, with a sudden change of voice and manner—

“Yes, of course—I forgot; naturally they are the people it would make most difference to.” He stooped and patted Jinny, who was ostentatiously tending her injured paw. “Did I hurt you, Jinny? Poor little dog!” he said, as if becoming aware for the first time of his offence. Then, after a time, “By-the-by, I heard from Barrett that Willy is in Cork. When do you expect him back?”

Even before he had spoken, I had realized the impression which my blundering mention of Willy must have given; but, in the shock of the discovery which I had just made, I hardly cared. Nothing could penetrate to my brain except one

thought that mastered it with bewildering force—Is it possible that he cares for me? Perhaps he fancied, from what I said, that the general gossip about Willy and me was true. I could almost have laughed for pleasure that he should mind so much. I looked up at him as he stood by the fire, with its light flickering on his gloomy face, and my self-possession returned to me a little.

“I know absolutely nothing about Willy,” I said, with decision. “I have not seen him since the night of the ball, and I have no idea when he is coming home.”

He came a step nearer, and looked at me dubiously; but there was new purpose in his voice as he said—

“Then, it is not——”

He stopped at the sound of a footstep outside the door. I recognized it in an instant.

"Here is Willy!" I gasped, in tones from which I vainly tried to banish the sudden inward despair which possessed me. The door opened, letting in a blaze of light, and Willy, followed by Roche with a lamp, came into the room.

The necessity of the moment gave me a fictitious courage. Pushing back my chair, I jumped up to meet him with an ease and cordiality intended to cover his embarrassment and my own.

"So here you are back, Willy! We have been wondering what had become of you."

He did not look at me as we shook hands, but he answered, in a voice as successfully friendly as my own—

"I was forced to go up to Cork on business. I thought I could get down last night, but I couldn't manage it. How are you, Nugent?" he went on stiffly. "You'll

have a pretty wet drive home. It was pouring when I came in."

Nugent at once took the hint thus broadly given.

"Yes, I dare say I shall," he said coolly. "Would you order my trap, please?"—turning to Roche, who had not yet left the room. "Good night, Miss Sarsfield. Does that ride hold good?"

He had taken my hand in his as he said good night, and he still held it with a strong pressure. Something weighed down my eyelids—I could not meet his eyes again, and I answered hurriedly—

"Yes—oh yes, I hope so! Good night."



CHAPTER VI.

THE HAND AT THE GATE.

“Which do you pity the most of us three?”

MOST girls at three and twenty believe that they have explored their own characters, and know pretty accurately their emotional capabilities. They have always been taking soundings in their souls, noting eagerly any signs of increasing depth or of shoaling water; the most trivial incidents have a local importance and imagined connection. In fact, the phrase, “Falling in love,” implies, in their case, a contradiction of terms, the various phases of the

disorder being accepted by its victims with scientific recognition.

I think I must have been very deficient in this power of self-analysis. I had always taken my life as it came, without much introspective thought of its effect upon me, and on the one or two occasions when I had been confronted with the necessity for knowing my own mind, I had never found the need for searchings of heart to discover if the germs of any unsuspected feeling were hidden there. I had taken for granted that I must be a hard-headed, hard-hearted person, somewhat probably of Aunt Jane's type. I used to listen with an amused sympathy to the intricacies of sentimental detail with which many of my friends recounted their experiences, and had often offered, not without a certain sense of superiority, the cold-blooded counsels of common sense.

It was to me the remotest of chances that I should ever be driven to weigh, as they did, the value of a sentence, a word, or a look; and yet, nevertheless, now, not three months after I had left America, this was precisely what I found myself doing.

I awoke, the morning after Nugent's visit, with an unfamiliar feeling of still gladness. I knew that some strange and delightful thing had befallen me; but I waited in dreamy security, till this new happiness that was waiting for me in my waking life should stir me to a clearer knowledge of itself. Slowly it all came back to me. In imagination I lived again through what had happened yesterday afternoon. The unacknowledged anxiety lest he should not come; the relief of hearing that he was not leaving the country; the incredulous uncertainty as to his meaning; and then—ah yes! I put

my hand over my eyes, dizzy even at the remembrance of the swift conviction which had taken me with such sovereign power—then, the certainty that he loved me.

How had it all come about? How was it that, before I well understood what was happening, my independence had been overthrown? Looking back over the time I had known him, I could find no reasonable explanation. Until the night of the Jackson-Crollys' dance I had never admitted to myself that I did more than like his society, and till then I had had still less idea that he did more than care for mine.

With a shamefaced smile at my own foolishness, I got out my diary, and searched through it for some mention of Nugent on the days on which I remembered to have met him. But its bald and unimaginative record had chronicled no

description of him beyond one pithy entry after the first day's hunting—

“Mr. O'Neill piloted me. Dull and conceited.”

I remembered quite well the satisfaction with which I had permitted myself this rare expression of opinion; and I laughed outright as I thought how the girl who had written that would have despised her future self, if she could have foreseen in what spirit it would again be referred to. “Dull and conceited!” Had he or I changed most since that was written? I pondered over it, and came to the conclusion that it was with him that the change had begun. I should never have altered my opinion of him, if he had not shown that he had altered his of me.

I slowly thought over the various stages of our acquaintance, ending, as I had begun, with the events of yesterday.

Woven in through all my reflections had been a little thread of uncertainty and dissatisfaction. What was the question that had been interrupted by Willy's inopportune arrival? Could he really have thought I was engaged to my cousin? It seemed at first as if he had suspected it; but I knew that what I had said was enough to convince him that he had been mistaken—that I was sure of, from the way he had said good-bye. Well, I should certainly see him to-morrow; perhaps even to-day, I thought, and trembled at the thought.

When I went down to breakfast, I found that Willy had finished his. This was practically our first *tête-à-tête* since he had come home. Last night he had not come into the drawing-room after dinner, and I had gone to my room early. He was standing in the window, reading a letter,

when I came into the room, and, with a keen dart of memory, my first morning at Durrus came into my mind. He had been standing in just that position as I came into breakfast that first morning after my arrival, and I well remembered the smile with which he had come forward to meet me. The contrast of his present greeting jarred painfully on me, and dashed a little the serenity in which I had tried to enwrap myself. The old boyish friendliness was all gone, and in its place was a spasmodic, constrained politeness, which was so foreign to his nature, and so hardly assumed, that it seemed to me the most pitiful thing in the world. I came near wishing that I had never seen Nugent, and I thought with humiliation of what Willy would feel when he knew how much my denials about him had been worth.

“I breakfasted earlier to-day,” he said

awkwardly. "I have to be in Moycullen at eleven o'clock. Is there anything I can do for you there?"

"No, thank you. But, Willy"—as he was leaving the room—"that reminds me, the O'Neills want me to ride with them to Mount Prospect to-morrow. Could I have Blackthorn?"

"Of course you can," he answered gruffly; "you know you've only to order the horse when you want him."

"Would you come with us?" I went on timidly.

"No, thanks; I'm very busy about the farm just now."

He opened the door and went away.

I had no heart to eat my breakfast; the tears were in my eyes as I poured out a cup of tea, and, making no pretence of eating anything, took it over and sipped it by the fire. All my gladness of the

morning had died out; I could only feel illogically sorry at this utter break and severance in the old relations between Willy and me. I was still dawdling over my tea when Roche came in to clear away the breakfast-things. His professional eye at once detected my unused plate.

“Will I get another egg biled for you, miss? Them’s cold.”

“No, thank you, Roche. I am not very hungry this morning.”

Roche turned a shrewd eye, like a parrot’s, upon me.

“Fie, fie, miss! That’s no way for a young lady to be. And Masther Willy wasn’t much better than yourself. You have a right to be out this fine morning, and not sitting that way over the fire.”

Roche and I had become great friends. Early in our acquaintance I had found out that he was the Patrick Roche whose

letters had given me my first impressions of Irish life, and I had often listened with affectionate patience to his rambling stories of my father's prowess in all departments of sport. As much to escape from his acute observation as for any other reason, I left the dining-room, and wandered aimlessly into the hall.

A whining and scratching outside the door decided me to try what the day felt like. I wrapped a carriage rug round my shoulders, and, putting on the deer-stalker cap which Willy had once made over to me, I opened the hall door, and was at once assaulted by Pat and Jinny. Having exhausted themselves in ambitious attempts to lick my face by means of perpendicular leaps at it, they proceeded to explain to me as well as they could their wish that I should take them to the garden, to hunt, for the hundredth time, a rabbit which had

long set at naught the best-laid plots for his destruction. I followed them to the old gate—a structure in itself very characteristic of Durrus—and opened it in the usual way, by kicking away a stone that had been placed against it, and by then putting my hand through a hole to reach the latch, whose catch on the outside had been broken.

I did not feel disposed to-day to help Pat and Jinny in their hunt, by struggling, as Willy and I had so often done, through the rows of big wet cabbages, whose crinkled white hearts showed the devastations of the enemy, and, leaving the dogs to form their own plan of campaign, I sauntered up and down the path between the lichen-cruste'd gooseberry-trees. In spite of Roche's recommendation of the weather, I thought it a very cheerless morning. There was a bite in the chilly

air, and each time I turned at the end of the walk and faced the gate, the breeze that met me was sharp and raw.

It was early in January—the deadest time of all the year, I thought, looking round. Not a sign of spring, no feeling even of the hope of it ; and somehow, in this cold, leaden atmosphere, my own hopes began to lose half their life. I turned and once more walked towards the gate, thinking that I would call the dogs from their futile yelpings at the mouth of the hole to which the rabbit had long since betaken himself, and would go for a walk. I was not more than half-way down the path, when I saw a hand put through the hole in the gate. As it felt for the latch, I quickly recognized its lean pallor ; the gate opened, and Uncle Dominick came into the garden.

“Good morning, my dear,” he said.
“I thought I saw you going into this

wilderness of ours that we call a kitchen garden, and I followed you in the hopes of having a little chat."

He was evidently in the best of humours—nothing else could have accounted for this unwonted desire for society, and, in spite of the dark rings under his eyes and the yellow sodden look of his skin, he looked unusually benign and cheerful.

"Perhaps you will take a turn with me round the garden," he continued affably. "I can see you are not dressed for a longer walk; although I do not for a moment wish to disparage your costume. Indeed, I do not know that I have ever seen you wear anything that became you more than that cap of Willy's."

I turned with him, and we walked slowly round the grass-grown paths which followed the square of the walls, stooping every now and then to save our eyes

from the unpruned boughs of the apple-trees.

“Dear me ! this place is shockingly neglected,” my uncle said, twitching a bramble out of my way with his stick ; “in old days it was a very different affair. My mother used to have four men at work here, and I remember well when it was the best garden in the country.”

We had by this time come to the dilapidated old hothouse, and we both stood and looked at it for a few seconds. Through the innumerable broken panes, and under the decaying window-sashes, the branches of a peach-tree thrust themselves out in every direction, as if breaking loose from imprisonment.

“Ah, the poor old peach-house !” said Uncle Dominick, digging a weed out of the path with the heel of his boot—“that was another of my mother’s hobbies. I

wish I had the energy and the money to get this whole place put to rights," he continued, as we walked on again; "but I have neither the one nor the other. I shall leave all that for Willy to do some day; for he is fond of the old place. Do you not think so, my dear?"

"I am sure he is," I answered, rather absently; my thoughts had strayed away to to-morrow's ride.

"I suppose you have seen Willy this morning? Did he seem in better spirits than he was in last night? I don't know that I ever saw him so depressed and silent as he was at dinner," said my uncle.

"Did you think so?" I replied guiltily. "I think he seemed all right this morning."

"I am very glad to hear it. I was quite distressed by his manner; indeed, latterly I have frequently noticed how variable his spirits have been."

I did not speak, and Uncle Dominick went on again with a little hesitation—

“I will confess to you, my dear Theo, that before you came Willy had been causing me very serious anxiety. You see, this is a lonely place; the O’Neills are much away from home, and he had no companions of his own age and station.”

“No, I suppose not,” I said, considerably puzzled as to the drift of all this.

My uncle stroked his long moustache several times.

“Well, my dear, you know the old proverb, ‘No company, welcome trumpery;’ that, I am sorry to say, is what the danger was with Willy. It came to my knowledge that he was in the habit of—a—of spending a great deal of his time in the house of—”—he hummed and hawed, ending with suppressed vehemence—“in the house of one of my work-people.”

I held my breath, with perhaps some presentiment of what was coming.

“Yes,” my uncle said, bringing his stick heavily down on the ground; “I heard, to my amazement and horror, that the attraction for him there was the daughter, an impudent girl, who was evidently using every means in her power to entangle him!”

“An impudent girl!” What was it that he had once said about a girl who had been taken out of her proper place, and had at once began to presume? In the same instant the answer flashed upon me—Anstey! Of course, it was she. How had I been so blind?

My uncle was silent for a few moments, and my thoughts raced back to incidents, unconsidered at the time, but which now recurred, fraught with a new meaning. I understood it all now—the girl standing

in the niche at the lodge gate; the words which I had overheard at the plantation; last of all, the figure in the rain at the hall door on the night of the dance.

“I was delighted to see, after you came, what an influence for good you at once seemed to exert over him,” Uncle Dominick began again. “I cannot say how grateful to you I have felt. The thought that Willy might be led on into doing anything to lower the family preyed upon me more than I can tell you, and it gave me the greatest pleasure to see what his feelings for you were.”

What could I say? Horror at this new complication about Willy, pity for Anstey, and the knowledge of what my uncle so obviously expected of me, were pursuing each other through my mind.

“I feared, from his behaviour last night, that there had occurred some misunder-

standing between you." He stood still, and looked at me interrogatively. "Of course, I do not ask for your confidence in the matter, but I think you know as well as I do what effect anything serious of that kind would have on him."

Honesty compelled me to speak. "I ought to have told you before," I began falteringly, "that I was thinking—I had almost settled that I was going back to America."

"To America? Impossible!" he exclaimed, in a startled but dictatorial voice; then, forcing a laugh, "Of course, I know you are a very independent young lady, but I have belief enough in you to think that you would not desert your friends."

"I cannot do what you want me to," I said incoherently; "I should be staying here on false pretences. I must go away."

"Nonsense!" he said impatiently. "I

beg your pardon, my dear, but your ideas of duty appear to me a little peculiar. I think, *all things considered*, you could scarcely reconcile it—I will not say with your conscience, but with your sense of honour—to let Willy ruin his whole life without stretching out a hand to stop him.”

“But I don’t know what you mean. You know I would do almost anything for Willy; but why should I be bound by my ‘sense of honour’ to stay here?”

I spoke stoutly, but in my inmost soul I dreaded his answer.

“Well,” said my uncle, with a disagreeable expression, “I think that most people would agree with me, that a young lady is bound in honour not to give such encouragement to a man as will raise hopes that she does not mean to gratify.”

There was truth enough in what he said to make me feel a difficulty in replying.

We had come to the gate, and he opened it for me.

“I do not wish to press you on this subject, my dear, but I am sure that, after you have thought it over a little, your fairness, as well as your kind heart, will make you feel the truth of what I have been saying to you.”

That was all he said, but it was enough. I went back to the house, feeling that, whatever happened, trouble was before me.

Roche met me on the steps with a note on a salver. I knew the handwriting, and opened it with a pulse quickened by a delightful glow of confidence and expectancy. I read it through twice over; then, mechanically replacing it in the envelope, I went up to my own room, and, throwing myself on my bed, I pressed my face into the pillow and wished that I were dead.



CHAPTER VII.

“THIS HIDDEN TIDE OF TEARS.”

“Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been.”

“Ah me! my heart, rememberest thou that hour,
When foolish hope made parting almost bright?
Hadst thou not then some warning of thy doom?”

THE fire in the library was dying out. I had been sitting on the hearthrug in front of it for some time, with my elbows resting on the seat of a low armchair, from whose depths Jinny's snores rose with quiet regularity. The window had been grey with the last of the dull light when I first sat down there, and, without stirring, I had watched the grey fading by im-

perceptible changes from mere blankness into an absolute darkness, that invaded the room and filled it like a cloud.

The turf fire, with soft noises of subsidence, had sunk lower and lower in the grate, and, abandoning its effort to light up the heavy lines of bookshelves, now did little more than edge with a feeble glow the shadow of the chimney-piece upon the ceiling. A few minutes before, a flicker had leaped up from the red embers; it had not lasted long, but the transient glare had made my eyes ache. For two or three seconds afterwards the blackened fragments of a sheet of note-paper had been shaken and lifted uncertainly by the thin turf smoke, and they were now drifting away with it up the chimney. My hand, lying open upon my knee, still retained the sensation of holding something which had been clasped tightly in it all the afternoon—

the letter which I had just burnt—and it seemed to me that in my heart there was the same sense of emptiness and loss.

It had cost me something to burn it, and as the flame crept over the pages, I had come near snatching it back again. But after all there was no need to keep it; its contents were not so long nor so intricate, I thought bitterly, that there was any fear of my forgetting them.

“DEAR MISS SARFIELD” (it began),

“My sister has asked me to tell you that she has been obliged to change her plans, and is leaving Clashmore to-morrow instead of next week. She desires me to say how sorry she is at having to give up the ride to Mount Prospect, and to go away without seeing you. She would write herself, but is too much hurried. I fear that I must make the same apologies

on my own account, as I find that I shall have to go to London in a few days, and may possibly not return before the summer ; and, as I am afraid I shall not be able to get over to Durrus, perhaps you will kindly let me say good-bye by letter.

“ Sincerely yours,

“ NUGENT O’NEILL.”

Nothing could have been more simply put ; nothing could have expressed more incisively the writer’s meaning. Even in the first moment of reading it, I had been at no loss to understand it. In the legitimate amusement of flirting with “ An American girl,” he had gone a little farther than he had intended, and he now lost no time in removing any undue impression that his words might have made upon her. What was it that Willy had told me long ago—how long ago ?—“ He could tell you many

a queer story of a Yankee girl he met at Cannes ! ”

Possibly he would now be able to add another “ queer story of a Yankee girl ” to his *repertoire*—how, in the course of a most ordinary flirtation, he had discovered one afternoon that this girl was losing her head, and how he had been obliged to leave the country so as to avoid further difficulties.

The last scrap of the letter fluttered upwards out of sight as this idea, which it had suggested, came into my mind. The intolerable sting of the thought acted on me like physical pain. I started up, but by the time I was on my feet I was ashamed of it. “ No,” I said to myself vehemently, “ he would never do that ; I have no right even to think it of him. And although, I suppose, he has changed his mind now for some reason or other, I know he

was in earnest when he was speaking to me; I am sure of it. Perhaps *he* lost his head too—men very often say more than they intend—and then when he got home he thought better of it, and felt it was only fair to let me understand as soon as possible that he meant nothing serious. How could I have been such a fool as to let half a dozen words upset my peace of mind?" I asked myself desperately. "Whatever he meant by them, it is no use my thinking about him any more. I had better begin at once, as he has done, to try and forget it all," I thought, as I groped my way out of the room; "but just now I feel as if it would take me all my life."

As I dressed for dinner, I shrank from the prospect of the long difficult hours that lay between me and the solitude of my own room. But I think that my powers of further suffering must have been exhausted;

a benumbing weariness was my only sensation as I sat at the dinner-table, and, looking from my uncle to my cousin, felt, in some far-off way, that our lives were converging to their point of closest contact, perhaps to their climax of mutual suffering.

I had not energy to talk, and I occupied myself for the most part in efforts to keep up the semblance of eating my dinner. Willy went on with his in a kind of resigned surliness, taking as little notice of me as was compatible with common politeness. This state of things I should much have preferred to any open signs of enmity or friendship, if I had not noticed that my uncle was narrowly observing us, and was even making various attempts to involve us both in the conversation, which had hitherto been little more than a monologue upon his part. Beyond an occasional grunt, Willy did not even try

to respond ; and as for me, though I did my best, utter mental and bodily fatigue made the framing of a sentence too laborious for me.

Several times during the progress of dinner, I found that Roche was looking at me with anxious interest ; and once or twice he came to my rescue with unexpected tact, by quietly changing my plate as quickly as possible, so that my uncle should not see how little I had eaten of what he had sent me.

Dinner was longer, and Uncle Dominick more determinately talkative, than usual ; but at last there came a break in his harangue, and I took advantage of it to make my escape into the drawing-room. I sat for a long time over the fire by myself, lying in an armchair without any wish to move. I felt as if I had sunk to the bottom of a deep sea, whose waves

were rushing and surging over my head, and I wondered dully if this was what people felt like when they were going to have a bad illness. My mind kept stupidly repeating one short sentence, "Let me say good-bye! Let me say good-bye!" They were the last words I had seen of Nugent's letter as it curled up in the flame of the library fire, and they now beat to and fro in my brain with sing-song monotony.

I believe I must have dozed, for the noise of the door opening aroused me with a shivering start. Willy came into the room with a newspaper in his hand, and, sitting down at the other side of the fire without speaking to me, began to read it. I fell back in my chair again, waiting till the striking of ten o'clock should give me a reasonable excuse for going to bed. The crackling of Willy's newspaper and the sleepy tick of the clock were the only

sounds in the room. I had never before seen Willy read a newspaper so attentively, and I watched him with languid interest from under my half-closed eyelids, while he steadily made his way through it. Now he had turned it inside out, and was reading the advertisements; certainly it did not take much to amuse him. Could he have felt, on that day after the dance, as dead to all the things that used to interest him as I did now?

It was only four evenings ago since I had listened miserably to the passionate words which I had not been able to prevent him from saying; he must have forgotten them already, or how else could he sit there with such stolid composure? If he could recover his equanimity in four days, perhaps in a week I should have begun to forget that persistent sentence which still kept pace with my thoughts.

The dining-room door opened and shut with a loud bang, and I heard the sound of uncertain footsteps crossing the hall. The crackling of the newspaper ceased, and a sudden rigidity in Willy's attitude showed me that he was listening. The step paused outside the door, and then, after some preliminary rattling, the handle was turned. Willy jumped up and walked quickly to the door, as if with the intention of stopping whoever was there from coming in. Before he reached it, however, it opened, and I saw that it was his father whose entrance he had been trying to prevent.

“It's not worth while your coming in, sir,” he said; “Theo's awfully tired, and she's going to bed.”

“Tired ! what right has she to be tired ?” said my uncle, loudly, coming into the room as he spoke. He put his hand on Willy's shoulder and pushed him to one side.

“Get out of my way! Why should I not come in if I like?”

He walked very slowly and deliberately to the fireplace, and stood on the rug with his back to the fire, swinging a little backwards and forwards from his toes to his heels. There was some difference in his manner and appearance which I could not account for. His face was ghastly white; a scant lock of iron-grey hair hung over his forehead; and the dark rings I had seen about his eyes in the morning had now changed to a purplish red.

“And what have you two been doing with yourselves all the evening? Making the most of your time, Willy, I hope? Perhaps that was why you tried to keep me out just now?”

He began to laugh at what he had said in a way very unusual with him.

“Theo,” Willy said abruptly, interrupt-

ing his father's laughter, “you're looking dead beat; I'll go and light your candle.”

“What are you in such a hurry about?” demanded Uncle Dominick, turning on Willy with unexpected fierceness. “Don't you know it is manners to wait till you're asked?”

Willy did not answer, but went out into the hall; and I, feeling both scared and angry, got up with the intention of following him as quickly as possible.

“Good night, Uncle Dominick,” I said icily.

He bent forward and took hold of my arm, leaning his whole weight upon it.

“Look here,” he whispered confidentially; “how has that fellow been behaving? You haven't forgotten our little talk this morning, eh?”

“I remember it quite well. Good night,”

I repeated, trying to pull my arm from his detaining hand, and move away.

The action nearly threw him off his balance ; he gave a stagger, and was in the act of recovering himself by the help of my arm, when Willy came back with the lighted candle.

“For goodness sake, let her go to bed,” he said, striding over to where we were standing, and looking threateningly at his father.

Uncle Dominick dropped my arm. “What the devil do you mean by interfering with me, sir ?” he said. “Let me tell you that I will not stand this behaviour on your part any longer ! I suppose you think you can treat your cousin and me as if we were no better than your low companions ? I know where you spent your afternoon to-day. I know what those infernal people are plotting and scheming

for. But I can tell you, that if they can make a fool of you they shall not make one of me! This house is mine. And you may tell them from me, that as sure as I am standing here"—emphasizing each word with a trembling hand, while he clutched the mantelshelf with the other—"you shall never set foot in it, or touch one penny of my money, if——"

"Look here!" said Willy, stepping forward between me and his father; "that's enough; you'd better shut up."

"How dare you speak to me like that? Your conduct is not that of a gentleman, sir!—not that of a gentleman! I say, sir, it is not—that—of——" His voice had grown thicker and more unsteady at every word.

"Here's your candle," said Willy, thrusting the candlestick into my hand; "you'd better go."

“She shall not be ordered about by you!” thundered my uncle, making an ineffectual step or two to stop me. “She shall stay here as long as I like. I will be master in my own house. Come back here!”

He spoke with such fury that I was afraid to go, and looked irresolutely to Willy for help. But before he could speak, my uncle’s mood had changed.

“Let her go if she likes,” he said suddenly, staring at me with a sort of stupefaction. “Good God! Let her go if she likes; let her go!” he cried, covering his eyes with his hands and dropping into a chair, and as I slipped out of the room I heard him groan.



CHAPTER VIII.

PAIN.

“Go from me. Yet I know that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow.”

I DO not often get a headache, but the one which woke me next morning seemed determined to bring my average of pain up to the level of that of less fortunate people. All day long it pressed like a burning cap over my head, till my pillow felt as if it were a block of wood, and the thin chinks of light that came through the closed shutters cut my eyes like the blades of knives. The infrequent sounds in the quiet house—the far-off shutting of a

door, the knocking of the housemaid's broom against the wainscot in the corridor, or an occasional footstep in the hall—all jarred upon my aching brain as if it had lost some accustomed shelter, and the blows of sound struck directly upon its bruised nerves.

The wretchedness of the day before had given way to the supremacy of physical suffering. I lay in my darkened room, thinking of nothing except how best to endure the passing of the slow hours. Once, as the clock in the hall struck three, I was conscious of some association connected with the sound, and remembered that this was the hour at which I should have been starting for Mount Prospect.

But it had all lost reality. Even the horror of that scene with my uncle and Willy in the drawing-room had been for the time obliterated, wiped out by the pain

of which it had partly been the cause. All that I felt was that some trouble surely was there, and, though in abeyance for to-day, it was already in possession of to-morrow, and of many to-morrows.

When, on the next morning, after breakfast in bed, I made my way downstairs, I felt as if a long time had gone by since I had crossed the hall. The house was cold and deserted. I dreaded meeting my uncle, but I saw no one; there was not even a dog to wish me good morning. In the drawing-room, the fire had only just been lighted; the blinds were drawn to the top of the windows, showing the various layers of dust in the room, from the venerable accumulation under the piano, to the lighter and more recent coating on the tables. I went straight to the writing-table, and, regardless of the cheerless glare from the sheet of grey sea, I began a letter to Aunt Jane.

Upstairs, in the early hours of the morning, it had seemed an easy and not disagreeable thing to do—to write and tell her that my Irish visit was over, and that, as soon as her answer had come, I should be ready to start for America. But when the letter was closed and directed, I sat looking at it for a long time, feeling that I had done something akin to making my will. The best part of my life was over ; into these past three months had been crushed its keenest happiness and unhappiness, and this was what they had amounted to. They had none the less now to fall into the background, and soon would have no more connection with my future life than if they had never been.

I had convinced myself so thoroughly that by writing to Aunt Jane I had closed this epoch in my life, that when, a few minutes afterwards, Willy came into the

room, I was almost surprised to find that he was as awkward and constrained as when I had seen him last.

“Oh! I didn’t know you were in here, Theo,” he said apologetically, stopping short half-way across the room. “I only came in to look for a pen.”

“Come in, Willy,” I answered, with an appearance of ease which was the result of the high, unemotional standpoint on which I had taken up my position. “I have just finished my letter-writing.”

“I hope your head’s all right to-day? The governor was asking after you yesterday,” he said, rolling his cap in his hands, and looking at the ground. “He was very sorry to hear your headache was so bad.”

I knew that he was trying, as well as he could, to apologize for his father’s outbreak and its too obvious cause.

“That was very kind of him,” I made

haste to answer. "My headache is quite well. I was thinking of going out, as it looks as if the east wind had gone."

"Yes, it's a nice day. I dare say it would do you good to go out."

Nothing could have made me feel more plainly the break that had come in what had been such "a fair fellowship" than his making no offer to come with me, and I realized with sharp regret that I had done well in writing that letter to Aunt Jane.

Willy turned to leave the room.

"I wanted to tell you about this letter," I said. "I have just written to Aunt Jane to say that I am going back to America in about a fortnight."

His back had been towards me when I began to speak, but he faced round with an exclamation of astonishment.

"What! going away? Why are you doing that?"

His face was red with surprise, and he had forgotten his shyness.

“I thought Uncle Dominick would have told you. I spoke to him a couple of days ago.”

“He never said so to me. On the contrary——” Willy stopped. “I mean, he didn’t give me the least idea you were going.”

“For all that, I am afraid I must go. I have been here an immense time already,” I said, finding some difficulty in maintaining an easy and conventional tone.

“Indeed, you haven’t!” he blurted out. “You know you told me you meant to stay on into the spring, and—and you know”—looking steadily over my head out of the window while he spoke—“there’s no reason why——”

“Oh yes, there is, Willy,” I said, interrupting him. “Poor Aunt Jane has been

by herself all this time. I ought not to leave her alone any more."

"Well, and won't you be leaving us alone too?"—still without changing the direction of his eyes.

"Oh! you will be no worse off than you were before I came," I answered, with the hasty indiscretion of argument.

He did not reply, and I had time to be sorry for my thoughtlessness, before he said, with an assumption of carelessness—

"Well, I'm going out now, and I advise you to do the same." He left the room; but, reopening the door, put his head in—"I say, don't send that letter," he said, and shut the door again before I could answer.

I did not meet Uncle Dominick at lunch. Roche told me not to wait for him, as he was not well, and would probably not come in; and I had almost finished my solitary meal before Willy appeared. He

and I were both more at our ease than we had been at our first meeting that morning. I do not know what had operated in his case, but for myself, I felt more than ever that I had become a different person—a person to whom nothing mattered very much, whose only link with the everyday life of the past and present was a very bitter and humiliating pain.

“I have to go into Moycullen this afternoon,” said Willy, occupying himself very busily with the carving of the cold beef. “I was wondering if you might care to ride there. The horse wants exercise, and I thought perhaps—you said something about wanting fresh air——”

I did not know how to refuse an invitation so humbly given, although my first inclination had been to do so.

“It is rather a long ride,” I began doubtfully.

“ Well, you can turn back whenever you like.”

I debated with myself. As I was going away so soon, it could not make much real difference to any one ; and Uncle Dominick had specially asked me not to neglect Willy. Besides—I could not help it—some faint hope struggled up in my heart that in Moycullen I might hear something of the O’Neills.

“ Very well,” I said finally ; “ I will go with you.”

Willy and I had often ridden to Moycullen. It was a long ride, but we had established a short cut across the fields at one place which considerably shortened the distance ; though experience had shown us that the amount of jumping it involved, and the rough ground to be crossed, did away with any great saving of time. To-day we went in off the road at the usual

gap, and as we cantered over the grass to the accustomed spot in each fence, the free stride of the horse, and the tingling of the wind in my cheeks, brought back the old feeling of exultant independence, the last remnant of my headache cleared away, and for the time I even forgot that quiet, incessant aching at my heart.

One or two successful conflicts with his horse had done much to restore Willy's confidence and self-possession.

"It's a long time since we had a ride now," he said, after we had come out over a bank on to the road again.

"Yes; I was just thinking the same. I am very glad I came out."

"We must try and get a look at the hounds next week; they meet pretty close—that is to say"—continuing his sentence with something of a jerk—"if you're not too busy packing for America then."

I did not answer, and Willy said nothing more until we had pulled up into a walk on some rising ground, from which we could see the town of Moycullen straggling out of an opening between two hills, its whitewashed houses showing dimly through the blue smoke which lay about it like a lake.

“And did you send that letter, after all?” Willy said, in an unconcerned way.

“Yes,” I answered; “you know I always write to Aunt Jane on Friday.”

“Then you mean to say you are really going back?”

I nodded.

“Well, I suppose you know best,” he said coldly.

Alaska put her foot on a stone, and stumbled slightly.

“Hold up, you confounded fool!” he said, chucking up her head roughly, and digging his spurs in.

The mare reared and plunged, and to steady her we broke into a trot, which brought us into the crooked, crowded streets of Moycullen.

It was market-day, and the carts that had come in with their loads of butter, turf, fowls, and old women blocked our way in every direction. I remained on my horse's back while Willy went off about his business, and for the next half-hour I only caught glimpses of him, doubling round the immovable groups of talkers, and eluding the beggars with practised skill as he dived in and out of the little shops. Willy's satisfaction and confidence in the warehouses of Moycullen, and the amount of shopping which he contrived to do there, had always been a matter of fresh surprise to me.

Beggars pestered me; little boys exasperated me by offers to hold Blackthorn,

regardless of the fact that I was on his back; and women clustered round me on the pavement and discussed my lineage and appearance, but I was too dispirited to be much amused by their comments. The glow of my gallop had faded out; I felt cold and tired, and thought that Willy had never before been so long over his shopping.

At last he appeared unexpectedly at my horse's shoulder.

"I was thinking that you must be dead for want of your tea. I've just ordered some at Reardon's, and you must come and drink it before we go home."

I assented without much interest, and began to push Blackthorn through the crowd. At the hotel I dismounted, and followed Willy listlessly into the dark, unsavoury commercial room, the only available apartment in which we could have

tea. Its sole occupant got up in obedience to a whisper from the boots, and hurriedly conveyed himself and his glass of whiskey and water from the room which had been allotted to him and the gentlemen of his profession, and I sat down at the long oil-cloth-covered table and began to pour out the tea, while Willy battered the fire into a blaze. He had evidently made up his mind to be cheerful, but as evidently he was not quite certain as to what to talk about.

I listened with as much intelligence as I could muster to such pieces of news as he had picked up during his shopping, but our conversation gradually slackened, and finally came to a full stop. I slowly drank the contents of my enormous teacup, wondering why it was that at country hotels the bread and butter and the china were alike abnormally thick. I noticed that

Willy had looked at me undecidedly once or twice during the last few minutes, and at length he said, in a way that showed he had been framing the question for some time—

“I suppose, if you went to America, you’d be coming back again?”

“Come back!” I echoed. “No, I do not think there is the least chance of my doing that.”

I had finished my tea, and got up as I spoke.

“Then you’ve done with the old country altogether?”

“Yes; altogether,” I answered resolutely, turning aside to study one of the oleographs on the walls.

I could not have said another word, but, in a sort of defiance of my own weakness, I began to hum a tune, one that had been in my mind unrecognized all day. Now

as I hummed it the straining sweetness of the notes of a violin filled my memory, and I knew where and how I had heard it last.

Willy said nothing more, but finished his tea, and, getting up, rang the bell and ordered the horses to be brought round. We had to stand for a minute in the doorway while they were coming. A cold wind was springing up with the sunset; the pale yellow light was contending with the newly lighted street-lamps, and over my head a large jet of gas flickered drearily behind the name "Reardon" on the fan-light.

"Hullo! look at the Clashmore wagonette," Willy said suddenly. "It's coming along now behind that string of turf-carts."

The turf-carts lumbered slowly down the narrow street, the chestnuts and wagonette

having, perforce, to follow at a foot-pace. On the box, sharply outlined against the frosty sky, I saw Nugent's figure, and inside was a huddled mass of furs, which I supposed was Madam O'Neill. My first instinct was to shrink back into the hall, but it was too late; Willy was already taking off his hat, and I bowed mechanically as Nugent lifted his, and drove past without speaking.

We rode quickly and steadily homewards through the darkening hills, an occasional word only breaking the silence between us. I had no wish to speak, no wish for anything but to escape from this miserable place, and to forget all that had happened to me since the night when I had first driven along this very road. This was the fulfilment of the foolish, unacknowledged hope which had been my real reason for to-day's ride. I had met Nugent, and could take home with me the certainty

that I had made no mistake as to what his letter had meant, and that he, for his part, would be quite sure that I had treated him, and was now treating my cousin, in a manner worthy even of the evil traditions of "American girls."

It was quite dark when we got to Durrus, but, as the gates swung back, I could see that it was Anstey who had opened them for us. I rode through a little in advance of Willy, who had checked his horse in order to let me go first. I thought I caught the sound of a whispered word or two from Anstey, and, with the clang of the closing gate, I distinctly heard Willy say in a low voice, "No, I can't."

I rode fast up the avenue so that he should not overtake me. I was sick at heart at this confirmation of what my uncle had told me. Everything was going wrong. I had spoilt my own life, and

now I had to stand by and see Willy ruin his, knowing that I had it, perhaps, in my power to save him, and yet feeling incapable of doing so.

When I met Uncle Dominick at dinner, his manner was more blandly affectionate than I had ever known it, and but for the recollections which his haggard face called up, I should have thought that the scene of two nights ago had been a dream.





CHAPTER IX.

GARDEN HILL.

“Was this to meet? Not so; we have not met.”

WEDNESDAY was the Burkes' At Home day. They were the only people in the country who had taken to themselves a “day,” and to go and see them, and to eat their peculiarly admirable cakes, had become a recognized method of spending that afternoon. To-day, at about four o'clock, when I came in, their small drawing-room was full of people, and their confidential little copper tea-kettle was already making incessant journeys between the fireplace and the tea-table.

Mr. Jimmy Barrett was carrying about cups of tea, steering his perilous way among the low velvet-covered tables and basket chairs with a face expressive of the liveliest apprehension. He was the only young man present—a fact in itself sufficiently overwhelming, and now made doubly so by the attentions which, *faute de mieux*, were being bestowed upon him by Miss Dennehy, a young lady whom I remembered as having been much sought after at the Mount Prospect dance.

He took the first opportunity of sitting down in an unobtrusive position behind his mother's chair, from whence he returned feeble and evasive rejoinders to the badinage levelled at him from the sofa, on which were seated Miss Dennehy and the rector's daughter, Miss Josie Horan. His mother, a lady whose ample proportions were a tacit reproach to her son's meagre-

ness of aspect, reclined imposingly in a chair by the fire, and several other ladies whom I did not know were sitting round the room.

The Misses Burke and their mother welcomed me effusively.

“Where’s Willy? I haven’t seen him this long while,” said Miss Mimi, regarding me with an expression of heartiest curiosity and good fellowship.

“No, indeed,” said Mrs. Burke; “we were wondering what had become of you both.”

She was a brisk little old lady, whose bright black eyes and hooked nose were suggestive of an ancient parrakeet, and whose voice further carried out the idea. I knew well that any cross-examination that she might subject me to would be as water unto wine compared with Miss Mimi’s, and I gladly turned and addressed myself to

her, and left Willy, who had just come into the room, to satisfy Miss Mimi's thirst for information.

His entrance caused a perceptible flutter in the room, and the occupants of the sofa at once began a loud and attractive conversation.

"I'm *dying* to hear more about the ball," began Miss Horan. "Aggie, you're really no good at all"—this with artless petulance to Miss Dennehy. "I'm sure Captain Sarsfield could give a better account of it. *He* wasn't sitting on the stairs all the time; were you, Captain Sarsfield?"

"I don't think she should ask us these questions, should she, Captain Sarsfield?" responded Miss Dennehy. "I think 'tis very wrong to tell tales out of school!"

I, from the low chair which I had taken beside Mrs. Barrett, listened in some anxiety to a discussion which for both Willy and

me was of so singularly discomposing a character. Willy, however, was equal to the occasion. Having fittingly assured Miss Dennehy of his abhorrence of tale-bearing, he provided himself with a cup of tea and a wedge of cake, and proceeded with unimpaired equanimity to seat himself on the sofa between Miss Horan and Miss Dennehy.

I had seldom seen Miss Horan, except behind the harmonium in her father's church, and should certainly never have suspected her of the social gifts which she now displayed. She had a flat little face, set in a shock of hair which had once been short and had not yet become long. Her pale blue eyes almost watered with pride and excitement, as she found that her conversation with Willy was attracting the attention of the rest of the room.

“And who was the belle of the room,

Captain Sarsfield?" she asked, when Willy had comfortably settled down to his tea.

"Well, as you weren't there, Miss Horan," answered my cousin, shamelessly, "I wasn't able to make up my mind about it."

A delighted titter ran round the room at this sally; as it ceased, Mrs. Barrett broke the monumental silence which she had hitherto preserved.

"My Jimmy," she said, in a heavy, distinct voice, that lent an almost Scriptural tone to her utterances, casting an eye of disfavour at Miss Josie, "told me that Miss Sarsfield and Miss O'Neill were the belles of the ball."

Deep as was my dismay at this unlooked-for statement, it was far excelled by that of its originator. On Willy's arrival he had altogether effaced himself; but now, from his refuge behind his

mother's chair, I heard him inarticulately disclaiming the dashing criticism attributed to him.

"Oh," said Miss Mimi, jovially, "we all know that Jimmy has an eye for a pretty girl! I thought," she continued, addressing Miss Dennehy, "they were very bad about introducing people the other night. Didn't you, Aggie?"

"Really, *I* didn't notice it, Miss Burke; but I heard a great many complaining about it, and I know the Croly girls like to keep their gentlemen friends to themselves," Miss Dennehy replied.

"Well," said Miss Horan, "I saw Sissy Croly yesterday, and she said that, indeed, she was introducing gentlemen all the evening. Oh, and she was *mad* with the O'Neills! She said that Connie O'Neill thought no one good enough to dance with but that officer they had staying at Clash-

more ; and as for Mr. O'Neill, he pretended he was engaged for every dance, and her fawther"—it was thus that Miss Horan pronounced "father"—"found him, after supper, sitting in the library reading the paper."

"Oh, I dare say," said Miss Dennehy. "I know he was engaged to me for the last extra, and as he didn't choose to come for it, I didn't choose to wait for him ; did I, Captain Sarsfield ?"

Mrs. Burke's continuous twitter of talk did not so engross me that I could not hear all this, and remember that it was Willy who, after his unavailing search for me, had become Nugent's substitute, and something in the rigid twist of his neck away from my direction told me that he too had not forgotten the antecedents of that dance. Since her last speech Mrs. Barrett had been as silent as she was

motionless. I should almost have thought she was asleep, but her eyes wandered to each person's face as they spoke, and somehow suggested to me the idea of an intelligent restless spirit imprisoned in a featherbed. She now saved Willy the necessity of replying.

“I wonder why the young ladies in this country are so anxious to dance with Nugent O'Neill, as they all abominate him so much?” she inquired solemnly.

Miss Horan and Miss Dennehy looked speechlessly round for sympathy at this accusation, but before their indignation found words, a diversion was created by the entrance of Mrs. Jackson-Croly and her daughters. Miss Sissy Croly lingered at the door to speak to some one in the hall. I recognized the voice which replied to her, though I could not hear the words, and some instinct of self-defence made

me rush into conversation with Jimmy Barrett before Nugent followed Miss Croly into the room.

Since the day I had gone into Moycullen I had been slowly and, as I thought, successfully hardening my heart. I had made a mistake, but it was not an irretrievable one, and here was an opportunity of proving to myself how little it had really affected me. So I talked sedulously to Mr. Jimmy Barrett, until, Mrs. Croly's greetings to the Burkes over, manners demanded that I should shake hands with her. Nugent was standing near, speaking to Miss Burke, and as I turned from Mrs. Croly he paused in his conversation.

"How do you do, Miss Sarsfield?" he said formally; then, after a moment's silence, he spoke again to Miss Burke—"Yes, I was to have started off yesterday, but I could

not manage it, and I thought I should like to see you before I go, as I may not be back again for some time."

"Why, every one is going away from the country!" said Miss Mini, directing her discourse to me. "Willy was saying, now this minute, that he was afraid you were thinking of being off too?"

"Yes; I have been thinking of it, but I am not sure. I have to wait for an answer from my aunt in Boston before I arrange anything," I said, with a confusion which took me unawares.

Miss Burke looked at me with delighted sagacity.

"Oh, now, I know quite well what that means! I don't believe you're going away at all—do you, Mr. O'Neill?"

In spite of my own embarrassment, it gave an indefinable pleasure to see, in the imperfect light afforded by Miss Burke's

lace-shrouded windows, that Nugent's imperturbable face was slowly changing in colour from its usual brown to a dull crimson.

But Miss Mimi, in the fullness of her heart, did not wait for his answer.

"I'll talk to Willy about it," she went on. "I'll engage *he* won't let you be running away from us like this!"

The fact that Nugent had turned away, and was speaking to Miss Croly, gave me sufficient assurance to make some airy response. But I had lost confidence in myself, and, cutting short the conversation, I again took refuge in my chair near Mrs. Barrett.

For some little time Mrs. Jackson-Croly's voice dominated the room, and obviated all necessity for conversation on the part of any one else. She also was talking of going away.

“Yes, Mrs. Burke,” she said; “I’m thinking of taking the girls to Southsea. There’s such nice military society there. I always like to take them to England as often as I can, on account of the accent. I loathe a Cork brogue! My fawther took me abroad every year; he was so alormed lest I’d acquire it, and I assure you, when we were children, he used to insist on mamma’s putting cotton wool in our ears when we went to old Mr. Flannagan’s church, for fear we’d ketch his manner of speaking.”

“Dear, dear!” said Mrs. Burke, sympathetically, wholly unmoved by this instance of the refinement of Mrs. Croly’s father. “Poor old Johnny Flannagan! He had a beautiful voice in the pulpit. I declare”—turning to me—“sometimes you’d think the people out in the street would hear him, and the next minute

you'd think 'twas a pigeon cooing to you."

At another time I should probably have been inclined to lead Mrs. Burke on to more reminiscences of this gifted divine, but my sole idea now was to get away as soon as possible. I looked to see if Willy had nearly finished his tea, but found that it was still in progress; in fact, when I looked round, Miss Dennehy and Miss Horan were engaged in throwing pieces of cake into his open mouth, loud laughter announcing equally the success or failure of their aim. Willy caught my eye, and guiltily shut his mouth.

"Do you want the horses, Theo?" he said, rightly interpreting my look, and hastily getting up from the sofa, while small pieces of cake fell off him in every direction. "I'll go round and see about them."

"Now, you needn't be in such a hurry,

Willy," said Miss Burke, getting up. "There's just light enough left to show your cousin my new Plymouth Rocks. I've been telling her all about them; and I've the doatiest little house built for them in the yard! Come along, Miss Sarsfield; we'll slip out by the greenhouse while he's getting the horses;" and, snatching up a purple woollen antimacassar from the back of the chair, she wrapped her head and shoulders in it, and with total unconsciousness of her extraordinary appearance she led me out of the room.

The evening had grown very cold. I had felt smothered in the little drawing-room, but now I shivered as I stood by the wired enclosure in the corner of the garden, watching the much-vaunted Plymouth Rocks picking and scratching about their gravel yard, and listening with simulated intelligence to Miss Burke's harangue upon their

superiority to all other tribes of hens. Beyond the fact that hens laid eggs in greater or less profusion, I knew nothing about them. But, fortunately, Miss Mimi's enthusiasm asked for no more than the stray word or two of ignorant praise with which I filled up her infrequent pauses.

My eyes took in, without losing any detail of absurdity, the effect of her large face and majestic nose, surmounted by the purple antimacassar, but my brain did not seem to receive any definite impression from it. Every faculty was deadened by the battle between pride and despair that was being fought out in me again. I had persuaded myself that that fight was over and done with; but now as I stood in the damp twilight, and looked at the firelit drawing-room windows, I felt that this time despair might be likely to get the mastery.

Miss Mimi's voice broke strangely in on my thoughts.

"Well, now, wait a moment till I go round to the back," she said. "Me greatest beauties are roosting in the house; but I must run into the kitchen for the key, and then I can get in and poke them out for you to see them."

She went round through a door in the thick fuchsia hedge, which encircled the garden and divided it from the yard, and left me standing by myself in the chilly silence of the evening. I had almost forgotten what I was waiting there for, though it could not have been more than three or four minutes since Miss Burke left me, when I heard steps come through the yard, and the faint smell of cigarettes penetrated the hedge. A horse's hoofs clattered on the stones as it was led out of the stable.

“ Well, good-bye, Nugent,” said Willy’s voice. “ Will you be away long ? ”

“ Yes ; I dare say I shall not be home for some time. I am thinking of going abroad for a bit.”

“ Abroad ? Where to ? Is it to Cannes again ? Or will you take a run over to—to the U-nited States ? ” said Willy, with an indifferent assumption of an American accent.

One or two movements from the horse filled the brief silence which ensued, and when Nugent spoke again it was evident he had mounted.

“ No,” he said ; “ that’s about the last place I should ever want to go to. Well, good-bye. I suppose I shall find you here when I get back ? ” He went on a few steps, and stopped. “ Say good-bye to Miss Sarsfield for me, will you ? ” he said, and rode out of the yard.



PART III.
PROFIT AND LOSS.

CHAPTER I.

A THREAT.

“ With morning wakes the will, and cries,
‘Thou shalt not be the fool of loss.’ ”

“ A night of mystery. Strange sounds are swept
Through the dim air.”

AUNT JANE’S answer to my letter had come. It had been much what I expected it would be; she said she would be satisfied to see me back at any time I saw fit to come, and she even unbent so far as to say that the sooner that was, the better pleased she would be.

That was a week ago, and I was still

at Durrus. If I had kept to my original idea, I should by this time have been on the Atlantic; but the steamer by which I had meant to have sailed was only taking to Aunt Jane a letter, in which I had for the present, at all events, postponed my return. I had not been able to explain very clearly my reasons for changing my mind—principally for the excellent one that I was not quite certain what they were. As the date on which I had settled to go came nearer, it had appeared to me that the imperative necessity for my leaving Durrus became more and more imaginary.

I had gradually come to take fresh views of life. It was not very long since I had seen, for the first time, a new aspect of it, and had weakly given myself over to its enchantment. But since then I had made up my mind that that aspect was one that did not concern me personally any more,

and I now believed that there was nothing to prevent me from going on with my life in the old way, as if I had never had that glimpse of another possible future.

My idea that on Willy's account I ought to go away had changed into the directly opposite conviction, that on his account I ought to stay. What my uncle had said to me about him that morning in the garden had not, I must admit, very greatly disquieted me. I knew very well—I could not help knowing it—that what he had said was true, and that it was my influence which, though unintentionally on my part, had driven Anstey's into the background. But I would not believe his warning that there was any further danger in the future.

Poor little Anstey! Uncle Dominick's hints had made me think with a great deal of unavailing pity about her. The

recollection of her soft eyes and deprecating voice made his definition of her as "an impudent girl" singularly inappropriate. I had very little doubt but that Willy, being both susceptible and idle, had amused himself, for want of better occupation, by making love to her, and, so far from pitying him for being "entangled," all my sympathies were on the side of the "entangler." Even if he had ever had any real feeling for her, it had become, I was very sure, a thing of the past; and, knowing Uncle Dominick's strong wish that I should stay at Durrus, I believed that he had ingeniously used this imaginary peril as a reason for my doing so.

However, that whispered interchange of words at the gate on the way home from Moycullen, gave unexpected reality to his fears as to the consequences of a "misunderstanding" between Willy and me.

Here was his prophecy being fulfilled, and I was all the angrier with Willy from the haunting feeling that it was I who had to a great extent revived this undesirable state of things. It was of no use to try and persuade myself that I had no real moral responsibility in the matter. My conscience had developed an exasperating sensitiveness in connection with Willy, and was persistently deaf to the excellent arguments which I brought to bear upon it. I began to wonder whether it might not be possible to undo some of the harm I had done, by beginning over again with Willy on new lines—by adopting a friendliness so frank and so unsentimental, that he should gradually be led into a state of calm and cousinly companionship.

I lost no time in trying the experiment, but after a few days I had to confess to myself that it was uphill work. Willy was

baffling, more baffling than I had believed he ever could be. I did not even know whether he appreciated the cheerfulness which I sometimes found it so hard to keep up. There was a latent moroseness about him by which, perhaps from its unaccustomedness, I could not help being a little overawed. It bewildered me and set me at fault to see him spend the evening, as he often did, in virtuously reading some standard work, instead of wasting it in our old good-for-nothing way, by sitting over the fire and doing nothing more profitable than playing with the dogs and talking illiterate gossip. I could not make him out. I had once thought his character a very simple one, so much so as to be almost uninterestingly transparent, and this new complexity occupied my mind and mystified me considerably. I suppose mystery is always interesting, and just then I was

inclined to cling to anything that led my thoughts away from myself. At all events, whatever might have been the cause, I thought and speculated about him more than I had ever done before.

On the day that we went to the Burkes', he had been more incomprehensible than ever. He rode there with me in a state of such profound gloom, that I wondered if it were the result of some culminating quarrel with his father. I certainly could never have anticipated the admirable way in which, during the visit, he comported himself; still less his continued good spirits on the way home. I did not at the time understand their cause, but I afterwards knew that it was what had happened that afternoon that had, to a great extent, cleared the atmosphere. It was now more than a fortnight since then, and he had had no very serious relapse into moodiness.

We had pretty nearly arrived at the ideal friendly but unromantic footing that I had hoped for—quite enough for me to permit myself a little self-glorification, and going back to America any sooner than I had intended seemed more unnecessary than ever. Uncle Dominick had effaced himself almost entirely from our lives. Dinner was now the only time during the day that I saw him, and he used to sit and listen to what we were saying without joining in it. There was nothing about him to remind me of his outburst that night in the drawing-room. When he spoke, it was usually to say something which, for him, was almost affectionate, and his manner often showed traces of feebleness and exhaustion which were very new with him.

Thursday, the 28th of January, was Willy's twenty-fifth birthday. We had

fitly celebrated it by going out hunting, and, having come home hungry after a good day's sport, were now, in consideration of having had no lunch, indulging in poached eggs at afternoon tea.

“The men in the yard tell me that there are to be great doings to-night in honour of me,” Willy remarked, when the first sharp edge had been taken off his appetite. “There's to be a bonfire outside the front gate, and Conneen the piper, and dancing, and everything. It means that I'll have to send them a tierce of porter, and that you'll have to turn out after dinner and go down and have a look at them.”

“So long as they don't ask me to dance, I shall be very glad to go. But would your father mind?”

“Mind? Not he! You're such a 'white-headed boy' with him these times, you can do what you like with him. By

Jove, he's a deal fonder of you than he ever was of me!" said Willy, with ungrudging admiration.

"I am sure he is not," I said lazily, and as much for the sake of contradiction as from any false modesty. "It is most unlikely. I know if I were he, I should naturally like you better than I like myself."

"What on earth are you trying to say?" said Willy. "Would you mind saying it all over again—slowly?"

"I mean," I said, slightly confused, but sticking to my point—"I mean that if I were your father, I should see a great many more reasons for being fond of *you* than I should of *me*."

"Well, as far as I can make that out," said Willy, grinning exasperatingly, "it seems to me that it's a pity you're not my father."

“ You know perfectly well what I mean. Just suppose that I was your father—— ”

“ I’d rather not, thanks.”

I did not heed the interruption. “ I should be much fonder of you—— ”

“ Then, why aren’t you ? ”

“ I don’t care what you say,” I said, feeling I was getting the worst of it ; “ I know what I mean quite well, and so would you, only that you choose to be an idiot.” And, getting up, I left the room with all speed, in order to have the last word in a discussion which was taking a rather difficult tone.

The sea-fog had crept up from the harbour towards evening, and it fell in heavy drops from the trees upon Willy and me as we walked down the avenue after dinner to see the bonfire. There was no moon visible, but the milky atmosphere held some luminous suggestion of past or

coming light. It was a still night; we could hear the low booming of the sea in the caves below the old graveyard, and the nearer splashing of the rising tide among the Durrus rocks.

“There’s no sound I hate like that row the ground-swell makes out there at the point,” said Willy. “If you’re feeling any way lonely, it makes you want to hang yourself.”

“I like it,” I said, stopping to listen. “I often lie awake and listen to it these nights, when the westerly wind is blowing.”

“Maybe you’d get enough of doing that if you were here by yourself for a bit, and knew you’d got to stop here. I tell you you’ve no notion what this place is like in the winter. Sometimes there’s not a creature in the country to speak to from one month’s end to another.”

"I ought to know something about it by this time."

"You think you do," he answered, with a short laugh. "But you can't very well know what it was like before you came, no more than you can tell what it will be like when you're gone."

We moved on again.

"Cannot you ever get away?" I asked sympathetically.

"No; how could I leave the governor? I tell you," he went on, "that if you were boxed up here with no one to talk to but him, you'd go anywhere for company." He stopped for a moment. "Do you know that, before you came here last October, I was as near making a fool of myself as ever a chap was"—breaking off again, but continuing before I could speak—"I believe I didn't care a hang what I did with myself then. I suppose you'll think that I'm

an ass, but it's very hard to have no one at all who cares about you."

"I am sure it must be," I said, feeling very uncomfortable, and walking quickly on.

I had a nervous feeling that in confidences of this kind I might find the "calm and cousinly" footing that I so much desired, slipping from under my feet.

We were now near the gate, and could already hear the squeals of the bagpipe, and see the glare of the bonfire in the fog. All round the semi-circular sweep outside the lodge, a row of women and girls were seated on the ground, with their backs to the ivy-covered wall, while a number of men and boys were heaping sticks on to a great glowing mound of turf that was burning in the middle of the road. The barrel of porter which Willy had sent was propped up in one of the niches in the

wall, and in the other niches, and along the top of the walls, were clustered innumerable little boys.

As Willy and I came through the open gates, a sort of straggling cheer was set up by the men, which was shrilly augmented and prolonged by shrieks from the children in the niches. Willy walked up to the bonfire.

“Well, boys,” he said, “that’s a great bonfire you have. I’m glad to see you all here.”

At this moderate display of eloquence there was another cheer, and as it died away, a very old man, in knee-breeches and tail-coat, came forward, and, to my intense amazement, kissed Willy’s hand.

“I’m a tenant in Durrus eighty-seven years,” he said, “an’ if I was dyin’ this minute, I’d say you were the root and branch of your grandfather’s family! Root and branch—root and branch!”

I was not given time to ponder over the meaning of this occult commendation, for an old woman, darting forward, snatched Willy's hand from the man. She also began by kissing it resoundingly, but, with an excess of adoration, she flung it from her.

"On the mout'! on the mout'!" she screamed, flinging her arms round him; and then, dragging his face down to hers, she suited the action to the word.

Willy submitted to the salute with admirable fortitude; but, in order to avoid further demonstrations of a similar kind, he called upon Conneen the piper to play a jig. I heard from the other side of the road a long preliminary drone, and the piper, a weird-looking, crippled hunchback, seated on a donkey, began to produce from his bagpipes a succession of sounds of varying discordancy, known as "The Fox-hunter's Jig."

I drew back into the smaller gateway to watch the dance. The figures of the four dancers showed darkly against the background of firelit, steamy fog, and the flames of a tar-barrel which had just been thrown upon the bonfire glared unsteadily on the faces of the people, and on the glowing network of branches overhead. Willy was one of the four who were dancing, and was covering himself with glory by the number and intricacy of his steps. He had chosen as his partner the stout lady in whose cottage we had once sheltered from the rain, and above the piercing efforts of the bagpipes to render in "The Foxhunter's Jig" the various noises of the chase, the horn, the hounds, and the hunters, the plaudits of the audience rose with more and more enthusiasm.

"More power, Masther Willy!"

"Tighten yourself now, Mrs. Sweeny!"

“ Ah ha ! d’ye mind that for a lep !
He’s the divil’s own dancer ! ”

I looked on and listened to it all from the gateway, feeling, in spite of my Sarsfield blood, a stranger in a strange land. I did not recognize many of the people about me ; beyond some of the junior members of the Durrus household, who nodded to me with the chastened, reserved friendliness of the domestic servant when away from her own roof, and Mary Minnehane, whose white teeth shone in a broad grin when I looked at her, I knew no one. Neither Anstey nor her mother were anywhere to be seen, though I had looked up and down the row of faces several times for them. A small, ugly old man, whom I knew to be Michael Brian, the lodge-keeper, was in charge of the barrel of porter. I noticed during the dance that, although he never took his eyes off the

dancers, he did not applaud, and before it was over he left the barrel in the care of a subordinate, and went past me into the lodge.

In a minute or two he returned, bringing Anstey with him, and she began to help him in dispensing the porter. The niche in which it was placed was quite near to where I was standing, and I could hear him scolding her in a low voice. She looked frightened and unhappy, and Willy's half-confession on the way down made me watch her with a peculiar, pitying interest. When the jig had ended with a long squeal from the pipes, intended, I presumed, to represent the fox's death-agony, Willy led his breathless partner back to her place, and slowly made his way to me, amid a shower of compliments and pious ejaculations.

"Phew! I'm mostly dead!" he said, leaning against the gatepost beside me,

and fanning himself with his cap. "Mrs. Sweeny has more going in her than ten men, and dancing on the gravel is no joke."

While he was speaking, I saw that his eye had fallen on Anstey, and almost imperceptibly he faced more and more in my direction, till his back was turned to her and her father. Another dance began, but, instead of joining in it, he lighted a cigarette and went on talking to me.

"Perhaps we'd better be getting home," he said presently. "You must have seen about enough of it."

We moved from where we were standing into the carriage-drive, and he said a general good night to the assemblage. The jig was stopped, and one of the dancers shouted—

"Three cheers for Masther Willy!"

"Huzzay!" rose the chorus.

"And three cheers for Miss Sarsfield!"

called out a woman's voice, which I fancied I recognized as my friend Mary Minnehane's, and another "Huzzay!" arose in my honour.

Willy looked at me with a beaming face.

"Do you hear that, Theo? You see, *they* think a good deal of you too."

"It's very kind of them," I replied, retreating precipitately into the darkness; "but I hope they don't expect me to make a speech."

"Masther Willy!"

I heard a hoarse whisper behind me, and, looking back, I saw that old Michael Brian had followed Willy through the gates.

"Masther Willy, aren't you goin' to dance with my gerr'l?"

"No, I'm not; I'm going home," said Willy, roughly. He turned away, but Brian caught his sleeve.

"Ah! come back now and dance with

her," he said, in a part bullying, part wheedling voice; "don't give her the go by."

Willy wrenched away his sleeve.

"Go to the devil! You're drunk!" he said, in a low angry voice.

"Dhrunk is it? Wait a while, and you'll see if I'm dhrunk," said Brian, following him as he turned from him, and speaking more threateningly. "Dhrunk or sober, there'll be work yet before ye're done with me."

Willy made no remark on what had taken place as he joined me where I was standing a few paces in advance of him. I did not know what to say, and we walked silently away up the avenue. The noise of the bagpipes died away behind us in the fog, and the moaning rush of the tide, now full in, on the strand, was again the only sound to be heard. We had got into the

darkness of the clump of elms, when Willy stopped short.

"I thought I heard some one there in the trees," he said. "I wonder if that old blackguard——" He did not finish the sentence, and we both listened.

"I don't hear anything now, whatever," he said, moving on. But before we had gone more than a few steps, I heard a twig snap.

"There *is* something there," I said apprehensively, coming closer to him. He felt for my hand, and put it into his arm.

"Never mind; very likely it's only a stray jackass; don't be frightened at all."

We walked on quickly until we were in the open beyond the little wood, and we were near the house before he spoke again.

"Theo, I think I've made the most miserable hash of my life that ever any one did. You needn't say anything, and you

needn't think that I'm going to say anything that would annoy you anyway; but I just feel that everything's gone against me, and I may as well chuck it all up."

"Oh, that's nonsense, Willy!" I said, trying to speak with more cheerfulness than I felt. "That is a very poor way of looking at things."

"Very likely, but it's the only way I've got." We were on the steps by this time, and he opened the hall door. "Anyhow, it doesn't make much difference how I look at them; I suppose it will all come to the same sooner or later."

He shut the door with a bang, and I went upstairs.





CHAPTER II.

“BUT WHERE IS COUNTY GUY?”

“What shall assuage the unforgotten pain,
And teach the forgetful to forget?”

I LAY awake for a long time after I got into bed, and I had not been long asleep when some sound wakened me. I was at first not sorry to awake; I had been sleeping uneasily and feverishly, and my dreams had been full of disasters and difficulties. I did not trouble myself much as to what the sound was—probably a rat, as the house was overrun with them—and I tried to see the face of my watch by the light of the fire, which was still burning brightly.

I had made out that it was half-past one, when I again heard a sound. It was a movement in the next room, as if a chair had been pushed against by some one moving cautiously in the dark. I do not pretend to being superior to irrational terrors at night, and now the blood rushed back to my head from my heart, as I sat up in bed and tried to persuade myself that what I had heard was the effect of imagination.

There was dead silence for a few seconds, and then a hand was passed over the other side of the paper-covered door, as if feeling for the latch. I could not have moved to save my life, and remained sitting bolt upright, with my eyes fixed upon the door. It was a weak and badly fitting one, made of single planks, and at first refused to open, but it had finally to yield to the pressure applied to it. It opened with a jerk, and I

saw by the firelight that the figure which appeared in the doorway was neither ghost nor burglar, but was that of the woman whose special mission it had seemed to be to terrify me ever since I came to Durrus.

"What do you want?" I demanded, as courageously as I could, though my voice was less valiant than I could have wished.

Moll advanced a step into the room, keeping her face down and half averted from me, while her large hands kept clutching and plucking at the cloak she wore.

"Go away," I said, feeling exceedingly frightened. "You know you are not allowed to come in here."

She stopped still for a moment, and looked at me. The deep shadows which the fire threw on her face made it look absolutely appalling. Her lips moved incessantly, and her malevolent expression, as she glanced at me out of the corners of

her eyes, made me feel certain that she was trying to curse me; but, except a guttural mouthing sound, I could distinguish nothing. While this imprecation, or whatever it was, was going on, she kept edging sideways towards the sofa, and, cautiously putting out her hand, she picked up the large cushion that was on it.

Still watching me intently, she moved towards the bed, crushing and working the pillow about in her hands. I had no idea what she was going to do, and wildly thought of making a rush past her to the other door, and escaping down the corridor; but, beside the disadvantage of leaving a stronghold where, if the worst came to the worst, I could always pull the clothes over my head, I had a horrible fear that she might run after me. I determined to make a last effort, and, before she could come any closer, I said determinately—

“If you do not go away at once, I shall call the master.”

At this, to my unspeakable relief, she looked hastily round over her shoulder, and let the cushion fall. Drawing the hood of her cloak over her head, she slowly retreated into the room out of which she had come, and with a final roll of her dreadful eyes upon me, she closed the paper-covered door after her. I listened intently, and presently heard the rustle of her cloak against the walls as she went down the corridor, and soon afterwards a door in some distant part of the house opened and shut.

I drew a long breath ; she was out of the house now. I got up, and, with shaking limbs, dragged my big Saratoga trunk against the paper-covered door, and, having locked the other one, felt comparatively secure. As might be expected, I

did not get to sleep again very easily. I had always been aware of Moll's animosity towards me, but this was the first time it had taken active form. As my nerves steadied down, I remembered the sounds that Willy and I had heard in the avenue on the way home, and I wondered if jealousy on Anstey's account could have been Moll's motive in following us, and then in making her way, with what seemed like a sinister intention, up to my room. Yet it was hard to believe that such a creature as she was could comprehend and act upon an idea of the kind. I drowsily tried to connect this dreadful visit with her husband's words to Willy at the lodge, but before I could arrive at any satisfactory conclusion I fell asleep.

At breakfast I told Willy the greater part of what had happened, but I made as light of it all as I could. He was out of

spirits, and not like himself, and I had put off saying anything to him about it until we had almost finished breakfast. When I had ended my story, he pushed back his chair from the table and got up.

"I'll make them sorry for this," he said vindictively, his face flushing darkly as he spoke. "I'll teach that old scoundrel Brian to let Moll come up here frightening you! You look as white as a sheet this minute."

"I am sure I am nothing of the kind," I answered, trying unsuccessfully to look at myself in the silver teapot; "there is nothing the matter with me. If you will fasten up that little door into the other room before this evening, I shall be perfectly happy."

"Never fear but I will," he said; "and it'll be very queer if I don't fasten up that old hag too."

He stalked out of the room. I heard him go upstairs and along the corridor, and presently the noise of hammering echoed through the house.

I met him in the hall soon afterwards, putting on his cap to go out.

“I fixed that door the way it won’t be opened again in a hurry,” he said, with grim satisfaction, “and I’ve locked the other; and now I’m going to be off to fix Moll herself. She’s not such a fool but she’ll understand what I’m going to say to her!”

“I wonder what the attraction in that room was for her?” I said. “I have seen her in there several times.”

“Goodness knows! There was nothing in it, only an old broken chair she had by the window, and there were a couple of books on the floor that I suppose she stole out of the study to play with. One looked

like an old diary, or account-book, or something. I meant to bring it to show you, but I left it in my room with the hammer and nails."

"I am very much obliged to you for shutting up that door," I said, with sincere gratitude. "I had no idea you were going to do it for me at once. You are a most reliable person."

He had taken his stick out of the stand, and had opened the hall door; but he stopped and looked back at me.

"I think I'd do more than that for you," he said, almost under his breath, and went out of the house.

It was a fine morning, and I finally went for a walk along the cliffs with the dogs. I expected to hear all about Willy's encounter with Moll at luncheon; but, on my return to the house, I heard, to my surprise, that he had ridden into Moycullen,

and would probably not be home for dinner.

The afternoon lagged by. I had tea early, in the hope of shortening it; but the device did not have much success. As the evening clouded in, rain began to beat in large drops against the windows, and the rising wind sighed about the house, and sent puffs of smoke down the drawing-room chimney. I despised myself for the feeling of forsakenness which it gave me; but I could help it no more than I could hinder some apprehensive recollections of Moll's entry into my room. A childish dread of having all the darkness behind me made me crouch down on the hearthrug, with my back to the fire, and rouse Pat from a satiated slumber to sit on my lap for company. Something about the look of the fire and the sound of the rain was compelling my thoughts back to the after-

noon when I sat and waited here for Nugent. I did not try, as I had so often tried before, to drive away those thoughts, or to forget the withheld possibilities of that afternoon. Once more I gave myself over to the fascination of unprofitable remembrances, yielding to myself on the plea that it was to be for the last time. After to-day they would be contraband, made outlaws by the power of a resolution which I had newly come to—a resolution that I had been driven to by the combined forces of pity and sympathy and conscience; but to-day, for one final half-hour, I would allow them to have their way.

Dinner-time came, and with it no appearance of Willy. Uncle Dominick had for some time given up his custom of waiting in the library to take me in to dinner, and Willy and I usually found him

sitting by the fire in the dining-room when we went in. To-night, when I came in alone, he remained seated in his chair.

"We may as well give Willy a few moments' law," he said. "I hear he rode into Moycullen."

"He told Tom when he was going that you weren't to wait dinner for him, sir," interposed Roche.

"What business could he have that would detain him so late?" said my uncle, slowly rising and taking his place at the table. "Can you throw any light upon this absence, Theo?"

He looked anxious and surprised when I told him that Willy had said nothing to me about it. Several times during dinner he harked back to the same subject, and I was more struck than ever by the nervous uncertainty of his manner, and the strange way in which one idea took possession of

his mind. He looked so ill and worn, that before I left the room compassion made me screw up my courage to ask him if he would not sit with me in the drawing-room; instead of going to his own study by himself.

He shook his head. "You are very good, my dear; it is very kind of you to express a wish for my society. But I am much occupied in the evenings—letters to write, accounts to go over. Besides, I am used by this time to being alone—ah yes!" He walked feebly over to the door, and opened it for me to leave the room. "You must forgive me," he said.

To my amazement, he stooped down as I passed, and, putting his hand on my shoulder, he kissed my forehead.



CHAPTER III.

“LOVE’S LABOUR’S LOST.”

“‘Uncover ye his face,’ she said;
‘Oh, changed in little space!’”

“When Pity could no longer look on Pain.”

“FAITH, I don’t know anny more than yourself, miss. ’Twas twelve o’clock last night when he come home, and Tom says the mare was in such a sweat when he brought her in that he thought she’d never stop breaking out in the stable.”

“Where has he been all the morning? Did he breakfast long before I did?”

“It wasn’t half-past seven, miss, when he was downstairs calling for a cup of tay

from the servants’ breakfast, and, afther he taking it, he went out of the house,” Roche answered, rising stiffly from his knees after he had swept up and replenished the drawing-room grate.

“It is very curious,” I said to myself, going over to the window and looking out on the lawn, where the dogs were engaged in a long, unsatisfactory wrangle over a duck’s claw. “I wonder what has become of him?”

“Miss Theo,” began Roche, impressively, depositing his coal-scuttle in the middle of the floor, “I don’t like the way Masther Willy is, and that’s the thruth. Maggie told me he wasn’t in his bed last night at all; and Tom was saying he had a face on him that would frighten you when he orthered the horse yesterday.”

Something in Roche’s manner implied reproach and inquiry, and I felt obliged to

defend myself. "There was nothing the matter with him when I saw him last, yesterday morning."

"Is that so, miss?" said Roche, picking up his coal-scuttle preparatory to leaving the room. "Well, miss, maybe I'm only an owld fool afther all, but there's things going on I don't like."

Luncheon came, and again I had to eat it in no better company than my own. I began to feel seriously troubled about Willy, and finally put on my things and went round to the yard to see if I could hear anything about him there. He had been in the stables early that morning, to see the mare get her feed, Mick told me, and he thought he had seen him, a while ago, going round the shrubberies towards the plantation.

There had been sharp, sleety showers all the morning, and one of them now began

to fall so heavily that I had to take refuge in a stable while it lasted. I watched it impatiently, as it whipped the surface of the puddles about the yard and drove the fowls to the friendly shelter of the coach-house, and at the first signs of its abating I started for the plantation to look for Willy. By the time I reached the front of the house, the shower was quite over, and was driving out to sea. A wet gleam of sunlight shone on the trees, making every branch and twig show with pale distinctness against the bank of purple cloud behind; a pilot-boat was beating in to Durrusmore Harbour in the teeth of the cold south-easterly wind; the curlews screamed fitfully as they flew inland over my head, and I was weatherwise enough by this time to know that a storm was not far off.

The shrubberies were chilly and dripping,

and their narrow walks were covered with soaking withered leaves, but they were sheltered from the wind. I hurried along them, not very certain of where I was going, or what my exact intention in looking for Willy was. I had come to the place where I had once left the path to gather ferns by the stream, and was beginning to realize the absurdity of expecting to find him here, half an hour at least since Mick had seen him, when, at the angle where the two paths meet, I came suddenly upon him.

He was sitting on a tumble-down old rustic seat, with his elbows on his knees, and his face hidden in his hands.

“Willy!” I cried, starting forward, “what is the matter? Are you ill?”

He raised his head, and looked at me vacantly, and for the moment I felt almost as great a shock as if I had seen him lying

dead there ; if he had been dead, his whole look could hardly be more changed than it was now. A bluish-grey pallor had taken the place of his usually fresh colouring ; his eyes were sunk in dark hollows, but the lids were red ; and I saw, with a shame at surprising them there, the traces of tears on his cheeks.

“I’m all right,” he answered, turning his face away without getting up ; “please don’t stay here, Theo. It’s only that my head’s pretty bad.”

A small brown book was lying on the seat beside him, and he put it into the pocket of his coat while he was speaking. I was too bewildered to move.

“You’d better go in,” he said again ; “it’s awfully cold and wet for you to be out here.”

The feeling that I was prying upon his trouble, whatever it was, made me take a

few undecided steps away from him ; but, looking back, I saw that he had again relapsed into his old position, and with an uncontrollable impulse I came back.

“ I won’t go away, Willy,” I said, sitting down beside him ; “ I can’t leave you here like this. Won’t you tell me what it is that is troubling you ? ”

He neither lifted his head nor spoke, but I could hear the quick catchings of his breath. A thrust of sharp pity pierced my heart.

“ Do tell me what it is, Willy,” I repeated, careless of the break in my voice, putting one hand on his shoulder, and trying with the other to draw one of his from his face.

He was trembling all over, and when I touched him he started and let his hand fall, but he turned still further from me.

“ Don’t,” he said huskily. “ You can’t do any good ; nothing can—— ”

"What do you mean?" I said, horror-struck at the settled despair in his voice. "What has happened to you?"

"It's no use your asking me questions," he answered more calmly. "I tell you there's nothing the matter with me."

"I don't believe you," I said. "Something *has* happened to you since yesterday morning. Is it anything that I have done? Is it my fault in any way?"

"No, it is not your fault." He stood up, and went on wildly, without looking at me, "But I wish I had died before you came to Durrus! I wish I was in the graveyard out there this minute! I wish the whole scheming, infernal crew were in hell—I wish——"

"Oh, stop, Willy!" I cried—"stop! You are frightening me!"

He had been standing quite still, but he had flung out his clenched hand at every

sentence, and his grey eyes were fixed and dilated.

“I don’t know what I’m saying; I didn’t mean to frighten you,” he said, sitting down again beside me. “I had no right to say that—about wishing I was dead before you came. Your coming here was the best thing ever happened to me in my life. I’ll always thank God for giving me the chance of loving you; and no matter what happens, I always will love you—always—always——”

He caught my hand as if he were going to draw me towards him, but, checking himself, he let it fall with a groan.

“It’s all over now,” he said. “Everything’s gone to smash.”

A rush of wind shivered through the laurels, and shook a quick rattle of drops from the shining leaves.

“Why should it all be over? Why should not it begin again?”

I said it firmly, but it seemed to me as if I were listening to some one else speaking.

"What do you mean?" He stared at me.

"I mean that perhaps I made a mistake," I said, beginning to hesitate—"that perhaps, that night at Mount Prospect, I was wrong in what I said to you——"

"You're humbugging me!" he said fiercely, without taking his eyes from my face. "You don't know what you're saying."

"Yes, I do know," I answered, still with that feeling that another person was speaking for me. "I've thought about it before now, and I thought perhaps, if you would forgive——"

"Forgive! I don't understand you. Do you mean to say you would marry me?"

"Yes."

He looked at me stupidly, and staggered to his feet as if he were drunk.

“I’m having a fine time of it!” he said, with a loud harsh laugh. “She says she’ll have me after all, and I’ve got to say ‘No, thank you!’”

He swayed a little as he stood opposite to me, and then, falling on his knees, he laid his head on my lap, and broke into a desperate sobbing.





CHAPTER IV.

STORM.

“ And all talk died, as in a grove all song
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey ;
Then a long silence came upon the hall,
And Modred thought, ‘ The time is hard at hand.’ ”

“ In the shaken trees the chill stars shake.
Hush ! Heard you a horse tread as you spake,
Little Brother ? ”

THAT night the wind shifted to the southwest, and the storm that came thundering in from the Atlantic was the worst I had known since I came to Durrus. The rain had been coming down in furious floods ever since sunset, and as the night darkened in, the wind dashed it against my window

till I thought the sashes must give way. The roaring of the storm in the trees never ceased, and once or twice, through the straining and lashing of the branches, I heard the crash of a falling bough. The house was full of sounds. The rattling of the ill-fitting windows, the knocking of the picture-frames against the walls of the corridor, the loud drip of water from a leak in the skylight into a bath placed to catch it in the hall. Somewhere in the house a door was banging incessantly. It maddened me to hear it, more especially now, when I was trying to determine by the sound if the door which had just been opened was that of Willy's room. He surely must be in the house on a night like this; and yet his door had been open, and his room dark, when I had passed it on my way up to bed an hour ago.

Since he had left me in the plantation—

left me sitting there in stunned horror, with the rain beating down through the laurels upon me—I had not seen or heard anything of him. He had gone without another word of explanation, without saying anything to qualify that last speech, or that could give any clue to the cause of it. It was all dark, inexplicable. I could only sit over my fire in impotent anxiety, my brain toiling with confused surmises, and my heart heavy with apprehension.

I think I never was as fond of Willy, or as truly unhappy about him, as now, when I had just received from him a slight, the idea even of which I should a few months ago have laughed at. I did not care about my own point of view—I even forgot it, in my consuming desire to find out the reason of Willy's mysterious behaviour during the last two days. Nothing that had gone before threw any light upon the problem,

unless, indeed, Michael Brian's threat that night of the bonfire had had some incredibly sinister meaning. No, there was no adequate solution ; but the bellowing of the wind in the chimney, and the sliding clatter of a slate falling down the roof, brought home to me the one tangible fact that he was still out of the house, at twelve o'clock on the wildest night of the year.

The next day was Sunday. The storm raged steadily on, putting all possibility of going to church out of the question. The shutters on the western side of the house were all closed, and I sat in the semi-darkness of the library, trying to read, and looking from time to time through the one unshuttered window out on to the gravel sweep. Broken twigs and pieces torn from the weather-slatted walls were strewed over the ground. A great sycamore had fallen

across the drive a little below the house, and the other trees swung and writhed as if in despair at the long stress of the gale.

Roche came in and out of the room on twenty different pretexts during the day, and made each an occasion for ventilating some new theory to explain Willy's absence. I was kneeling on the window-seat, looking out into the turmoil, as the wind hurried the black rain-clouds across the sky, and the gloomy daylight faded into night, when he came into the room again.

"There's a great dhraught from that window, miss," he remarked. "You'd be best let me shut the shutthers. "You'll see no sign of Masther Willy this day, unless he's coming by the last thrain."

"Why, what makes you think that?" I asked eagerly.

"Well, miss, the postman's just afther

being here, and he said there was one that saw him at the station at Moycullen last night."

"At the station—Moycullen!" I repeated, in bewilderment. "Was he going away?"

"He was, miss. Sure he was seen getting into the thrain, though the dear knows where he was going!"

"Have you told the master that he was seen there?"

"I did, miss. Sure he's asking for him the whole day. He's very unaisy in his mind. He's roaming, roaming through the house all the day, and he's give ordhers to have his dinner sent to his own room. He wasn't best pleased when he found Masther Willy had locked up the room that's next your own, and twice, an' I coming upstairs, I seen him sthriving to open the door."

"Master Willy did that to prevent Moll

getting in there," I explained. "I will tell the master so myself."

"Don't say a word to him, miss, good nor bad," said Roche, shaking his knotted forefinger at me expressively. "He'll forget—he'll forget——" He sniffed significantly, and, as if to prevent himself from saying any more, he shuffled out of the room.

But Willy did not come by the last train; indeed, the storm was still too violent for any one to travel. I lay awake the greater part of the night, filled with feverish fears and fancies. Several times I could have been sure that I heard some one wandering about the house, and once I thought there was a shaking and pushing at the locked door of the room next to mine.

When I awoke next morning, I found that the wind had been at length beaten down by a deluge of rain, which was descending in a grey continuous flood, as if

it never meant to stop. The day dragged wearily on. Roche had spoken truly in saying that Uncle Dominick was uneasy and restless. It seemed to me that he never stopped walking about the house. I heard him constantly moving backwards and forwards, from the library to his own study, and every now and then the sound of his footsteps in Willy's room overhead would startle me for an instant into wondering if Willy had come home.

The long waiting and suspense had got on my nerves, and the gloom and silence made the house seem like a prison. I could neither read nor play the piano. I was debarred from even the society of Pat and Jinny, as, on the first day of the storm, their muddy footmarks in the hall had made my uncle angrily order their exile to the stable. I almost looked forward to dinner-time. I should then at least have

occupation, and a certain amount of society, for half an hour, and there was something usual and conventional about it which would be a rest after the tension and loneliness of the day.

Rather to my surprise, I found my uncle standing in the hall when I came downstairs to dinner.

“What a terrible day this has been!” he said, as he offered me his arm. “This rain makes the air so oppressive,” he sighed, “and I have a great deal to trouble me.”

He helped me to soup, and, having done so, got up and walked over to the fireplace.

“I have no appetite at all,” he said. “I suppose it is caused by loss of sleep, but I really have a positive distaste for food.”

He turned his back to me, and leaned his forehead against the high mantelshelf, while I went on with my dinner as well as

I could. After a little time, however, he came back to the table.

“Dear me ! I am forgetful of my duties ! Will you not take a glass of wine ? You must be tired after your long drive in the snow from Carrickbeg.” Mentioning a station between Cork and Moycullen.

I stared. “But I have not been out to-day.”

He put his hand to his head. “How forgetful I am !” he said hastily. “But the fact is, I am so upset by anxiety about Willy that I do not know what I am saying.”

“Then, have you heard that Willy is at Carrickbeg ?” I asked excitedly.

“No, my dear, no,” he said, shaking his head two or three times ; “I know nothing about him. I confused Carrickbeg with Moycullen. Till a few years ago, Carrickbeg was our nearest station, and in those days travellers did not arrive here till one

o'clock in the morning—one o'clock on a cold snowy morning." He slowly repeated to himself, with a shudder.

I felt very sorry to see how unhinged he was by what he had gone through, and I tried to persuade him to eat something, but without success. He poured himself out a glass of port, and, having drunk it, again left his chair and stood by the fire, fidgiting with a trembling hand with the objects on the mantelshelf. Dinner was soon over, and, not liking to leave Uncle Dominick, I drew a chair over to the fire and sat down. He did not seem to notice me, but began to pace up and down the room, stopping now and then by one of the windows as if listening for sounds outside; but the noisy splashing of the water that fell from a broken eaveshoot on to the gravel, was all that was to be heard.

"There!" he said at last, in a whisper;

“do you hear the wheels? Do you hear them coming?”

I jumped up and listened too. “No, I can hear nothing.”

“I *did* hear them,” he said positively. “I know they are beginning.”

I could not understand what he meant, but I went to the nearest window, and was beginning to unbar the shutters, when there came a loud ring at the hall-door bell.

“I told you he was coming,” my uncle said. “I must get out some brandy for him after his long drive in the snow.”

The hall door was opened, and I heard Roche’s voice raised excitedly, and then the rustle of a mackintosh being thrown off. I ran to the door, and, opening it, met Willy coming into the room.

His face was all wet with rain, and his hair was hanging in damp points on his

forehead. He took my outstretched hand and shook it, and, without answering my incoherent questions, walked past me into the room. My uncle was still standing by the window, holding with one hand to the heavy folds of the red curtain.

“What! Willy!” he said, coming forward, and staring at Willy with wild eyes in which frightened conjecture slowly steadied into reassurance. “Was it *you* who drove up?” A sort of sob shook his voice. “My dear boy, I am rejoiced to see you; but, good heavens, how wet you are!”—going to the sideboard and pouring out a glass of brandy. “Here, you must drink this at once.”

“I don’t want it,” said Willy; “I don’t want anything.”

He stood still looking at his father, who, from some cause or other, was shaking in every limb.

“How did you get up to the house, Willy?” I interposed. “Did you know of the tree that was blown across the avenue?”

“They told me of it below at the lodge, and I walked from the corner,” he answered. “I’ve got something to say to you, sir,” he went on, addressing his father. “You needn’t go away, Theo; you might as well hear it too.”

Uncle Dominick lifted the glass of brandy to his lips, and swallowed it at a gulp.

“Well, my dear boy,” he said, with a smile, and in a stronger voice, “let us hear what you have got to say.”

“It’s easy told,” Willy said, putting his hands into his pockets. “I went up to Cork on Saturday night, and Anstey Brian followed me this morning, and I married her there.”



CHAPTER V.

GOOD-BYE.

“Since there’s no help, come, let us kiss and part.”

“ ‘Not my pain.

My pain was nothing; oh, your poor, poor love,
Your broken love!’ ”

THERE was dead silence for some seconds, Uncle Dominick was the first to break it.

“You married her?” he said slowly, the words falling from his lips like drops of acid. “You mean to say she is your wife?”

Willy nodded stubbornly.

My uncle stood looking at him, the blood mounting in dark waves to his pale face, till I should scarcely have known him. He

made a stammering attempt to speak, and moved some steps forward towards Willy, groping with his hands in front of him as if he were blind, before the words came.

“Leave the house!” he gasped, in a high, shrill voice—“leave the house!”—swaying as if shaken by the passion that filled him—“you infernal, lying scoundrel, or I will kick you out like a dog!”

He stopped again to take breath, but recovering himself caught at the collar of Willy’s coat as if to put his threat into execution.

“You needn’t trouble yourself,” said Willy, raising his arm and retreating before his father’s onslaught. “You’ve seen pretty nearly the last of me now; but, whether you like it or no, I’m going to stay here for to-night.”

Uncle Dominick grasped at the edge of

the sideboard to steady himself, his face so dark and swollen that I thought he was going to have a fit.

“Stay here!” he roared, the full tide of rage breaking from him with ungoverned savageness. “Stay here! I’ll see you damned before you spend another night in this house!”

“Now, look here,” said Willy, in a hard, overbearing voice, keeping his eyes fixed on his father’s face, “it’ll be the best of your play to keep quiet. I’m going to stay here, and that’s the end of it!”

His insolent manner appeared to cow my uncle. The colour began to fade from his face, and his expression became more controlled, though it was more evil than ever when he spoke next.

“And your bride? May I ask if she has done me the honour of coming here?” He wiped a thin foam from his lower lip

with his trembling hand. "Or is she perhaps at her father's residence?"

Willy turned his face so that I could not see it. "She's in Cork," he said.

"I suppose you intend eventually to return here after your honeymoon?" my uncle went on, with a nasty smile, pouring out and drinking another glass of brandy, while he waited for Willy's reply.

"I've done with this place for ever," answered Willy steadily, looking straight at his father. "I married Anstey Brian for a reason that maybe you know as well as I do."

"What do I know about your reasons for degrading yourself?" interrupted my uncle, dashing his hand down upon the sideboard with a return of his first fury. "I only know one thing about her, and that is, that she and her family shall get no good of their infamous plotting!"—the

glasses on the sideboard clashed and rang as he struck it again. "You shall never own a stick or a stone of Durrus!" he cried in his harsh, broken voice. "Your cousin shall have it all—your cousin shall get everything I have. I will see to that this very night!"

"Oh, all right," Willy answered coolly; "the sooner the better. But I may as well tell you that if you went down on your knees to me this minute, I wouldn't touch a halfpenny, nor the value of one that belonged to you. I've money enough to take me to Australia, and when I go away to-morrow morning it will be for good and all."

I had up to this stood by a scared and silent spectator; but now I tried to make my voice heard—

"I won't have it, Uncle Dominick," I said, half choked with my own eagerness.

“It is no use leaving it to me; I won’t have your money.”

Uncle Dominick took no notice of me at all. He had sat down on the chair nearest him, his passion having seemingly exhausted his strength, and his hand on the table beside him shook and twisted as if he had lost all control over its muscles.

Willy spoke to me for the first time.

“See here, Theo,” he said gently, also ignoring my protest, “you’d better go on upstairs out of this; you can’t do any good here.” He glanced at his father. “Do go now, like a good girl; he and I have got things to settle before I go.”

He put his hand on my shoulder, and half pushed me to the door.

“Promise you won’t let him do that,” I said, trying to hold the door as he opened it. “Tell him I won’t have it.”

He did not answer; but, disengaging

my fingers from their grasp of the door, he held them in his for an instant.

“I’ll see you again,” he said; and then shut the door and left me standing outside.

I waited for a long time in the drawing-room, but Willy did not come. Ten and eleven struck; the fire died out, and the candles on the chimney-piece burned down till the paper which fitted them into their sockets took fire and began to flare smokily. I went out into the hall and listened, but could hear no sound of voices. Some one was moving about upstairs. Perhaps Willy had gone up by the back stairs from the dining-room. Perhaps he had changed his mind and did not want to see me after all, I thought, making my way up to my room in unutterable weariness and despondency.

There was a light under his door when I passed, and I stopped uncertainly outside.

He was dragging boxes about, and opening and shutting drawers; evidently he was packing. Should I call him? This would be my last chance of seeing him, as he was going away by the early train in the morning. But with the thought, the remembrance of Anstey fell like a shadow between him and me. What could I say to him if I were to see him? How could I ignore the subject which must be uppermost in both our minds? And yet, how could I bring myself to speak of it? Most likely he had felt this same difficulty, and had purposely avoided meeting me.

I went slowly on from his door, and into my own room, trying to realize the impossible thought that I had seen the last of Willy. Willy, the trusty comrade of many a day's careless pleasuring; who had taken me out schooling and ferreting, and had ransacked every hedge to cut for me

superfluous numbers of the flattest of black-thorns, and the straightest of ash plants—Willy, with whom I used to gossip and wrangle and chaff in the easiest of intimacy; who had been, as he himself would have expressed it, the “best play-boy” I had ever known. I could not believe in this grim ending, that would have been grotesque, if it had not been so tragical. Willy married to Anstey Brian, and going away for ever to-morrow morning, and going without even saying good-bye!—these were things too hard and too sorry to be taken in easily.

A knock came at my door.

“Theo, are you there? Could I see you for a minute?”

I opened the door and went out into the corridor. Willy was standing there in his shirt-sleeves.

“I heard you coming up,” he began

quickly, "and I came to say 'Good-bye.'"

"Oh, Willy!" I said wretchedly, "are you really going?"

"Yes; I'm off by the early train," he answered. "It's late now; I won't keep you up." He put out his hand to me. "Good-bye," he said.

I took his hand, and held it, unable to say a word.

"Good-bye," he repeated, in a whisper.

"Willy," I cried suddenly, "why did you do it? Why did you do it?"

"I can't tell you—I had to. Maybe, some day——" he broke off. "I must go. Will you say 'Good-bye' to me?"

"I will," I said, carried away by the restrained misery of his voice, and putting my arms round his neck. "You've been too good to me—oh, Willy, my dear, I've brought you nothing but bad luck. Good-bye."

I kissed his cheek—he was my only cousin, and I was never going to see him again—and then I tried to draw myself away from the grasp that was tightening round me, but it was too late.

“I’ll never say ‘Good-bye’ to you,” he said fiercely, straining me to him. “I won’t let you go till you tell me if you meant what you said to me in the wood. Was it me you cared for, after all?”

“Don’t ask me, Willy,” I implored. “Let me go!”

“I won’t!” he answered, with reckless passion, trying to press his lips against mine.

I put my hands over my face, with a shrinking which told me in a moment the depth of the self-delusion which had carried me to the point of saying I would marry him. He must be told the truth now, no matter what it cost.

“I meant that I was fond of you,” I said ; “but I never was in love with you.”

“I see,” he said bitterly. He let me go at once. “Then it was Nugent, after all.”

I turned away without answering, but at my own door I stopped, and again held out my hand.

“Willy,” I said, breaking into tears, “say ‘Good-bye.’”

He took my hand again, and kissed it softly ; he was crying too.

“God help us both !” he said. “Good-bye.”





CHAPTER VI.

A RESOLVE.

“Sad is my fate ; I must emigrate
To the wilds of Amerikee.”

Old Irish Song.

“In the fresh fairness of the spring to ride,
As in the old days when he rode with her.”

THE postmaster at Rathbarry was evidently not in the habit of despatching many telegrams. . He was now standing in the street, scratching his red beard, and looking thoughtfully up at the single wire which dropped from the tarred pole—literally the last outpost of civilization—down through the roof of his little shop,

while I read to him the message with which I had ridden over early on Tuesday morning.

“You know where Boston is?” I asked, when I had finished; “Boston, in America, you know?”

“*Boyshton*, miss?” he said, correcting my pronunciation. “I do, miss. Sure I think it’s there that me sisther’s son is a plumber these five years.”

“Well, listen,” I said, beginning to read it aloud again, “‘To Farquharson, 16, Charles Street, Boston. Start for Boston February 6th. THEO.’ Are you quite sure you understand it? It is very important.”

“No fear at all, miss,” he answered, and went into his shop to get my change.

This was a lengthy proceeding, which involved the sending of a little girl to the public-house opposite, and an argument, as to the amount to be returned to me,

between Mr. Cassidy, the postmaster, and his daughter. However, I was in no particular hurry to get back, and Blackthorn never objected to standing. The day felt more like May than the second of February. The only tokens of yesterday's rain were the swollen yellow streams in the gutters on either side of the narrow street, and the delicate clearness of the sky. It was so enticingly mild and spring-like, that by the time that Mr. Cassidy had brought me my change, I had made up my mind to go home by the longer road, instead of by the usual way round the head of the harbour.

The road I had chosen went past the Clashmore entrance gates, and as I rode slowly along it, I noticed the ravages which the storm had worked in The O'Neill's woods. Half-uprooted firs and beeches leaned forlornly against their

neighbours in every direction among the plantations that sloped to the road, and torn boughs hung over the demesne wall. Near the big front gates a group of men was collected in the road, where a tree had, in falling, partly broken down the wall. As I came near, one of them, a short, square man, detached himself from the others, and, lifting his hat, walked towards me. To my astonishment I found that it was O'Neill himself.

“How do you do? I'm delighted to see you,” he began effusively. “I see you're surprised to find me here. I came down from Dublin on Saturday, to settle some business, and I've been shut up ever since by the storm. I dare say you've had plenty of it at Durrus?” He hardly waited for my answer. “And what have you been doing with yourself all this time?” he went on. “I don't think

you look quite the thing—very charming, of course”—with a wave of his hand—“but still not as blooming as you did when I saw you last.”

“I have been in the house a good deal lately,” I answered evasively; “the weather has been so bad.”

“Has Willy come back from Cork yet?” O’Neill asked, turning to look at where his men were working as he spoke. “I heard that he was there yesterday.”

There was no use in trying to conceal a fact that would soon become common property.

“Yes,” I answered, in a constrained voice, “he came home last night, but not to stay; he—he went away again this morning.”

“Ah!” said O’Neill, still watching the sawing and chopping of the fallen tree; “has he gone away for long?”

“ Yes ; I am afraid he has.”

“ Gone to England, has he ? ” pursued O’Neill, running his pudgy hand along my horse’s neck.

“ No,” I replied unwillingly ; “ at least, I believe he is going there first.”

“ Then he *is* going to emigrate ? ” O’Neill said quickly, forgetting his endeavour to appear ignorant, and looking at me through his eye-glass with undisguised excitement.

I made no answer.

“ The fact is,” O’Neill went on, clearing his throat, “ I heard some rumour that he had got into trouble ; but I hoped it might not have been true. These people,” with a glance at his workmen, “ delight in exaggerating, especially if it is bad news.”

Then it *had* become common property.

“ What did they tell you ? ” I said faintly.

O'Neill's red face got a trifle redder.

"Well, it sounds preposterous, but they had some cock-and-a-bull story that he had—a—in fact," he said, looking considerably away from me, "they said he was married."

"It is quite true," I said, with despairing candour; "he has married the daughter of the man at the lodge, and he—that is to say—they, have started for Australia."

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated O'Neill. "Dear, dear, how very shocking! I couldn't believe it when those fellows told me about it this morning. What a pity it all is—a nice young fellow like that ruining himself in such a way, and we all thought——" He stopped and stammered, perhaps becoming aware for the first time of the connection between the news we were discussing and my pale face and red eyes. "I mean, we had never anticipated anything of this kind."

I began to gather up my reins preparatory to saying good-bye.

“I hope Madam O’Neill is quite well? I have not heard from Connie for a long time.”

“Oh, quite well—quite well, thank you. I left them in Dublin.” Then, laying his hand on the reins as if impelled by irresistible curiosity, “I suppose your uncle is very angry with Willy?”

I assented.

“Ah! very naturally; but, upon my soul, I think it was as much his own fault as any one else’s. He never could get on with his own family, you know. There was your poor father, now—the dearest fellow in the world—my greatest friend—though, of course, he was a good deal older than I,” O’Neill threw in parenthetically, —“he never hit it off with him. He hasn’t spoken to me for years past because

I backed up Owen when he got into trouble with his father ; and there was that other business about Owen's funeral—a hole and corner affair—no one given any notice about it, the poor dear fellow buried in Cork as if he were a pauper !” O'Neill paused, and blew his nose with indignant vigour. “ But all that's neither here nor there,” he resumed ; “ all I mean to say is, that Dominick was not the man to make the best of a young fellow. That poor boy Willy never got a chance. He was brought up, as you might say, among the common people ; and, now I come to think of it, we *did* hear something of this girl before—but that was before *you* came, you know. Ahem ! ”—he cleared his throat—“ it really is most incomprehensible.”

“ I am afraid I must say good-bye, O'Neill,” I said hurriedly, each of his words giving me a fresh stab ; “ and I do not

know if I shall see you again, as I am going away on Saturday. I am going back to America."

O'Neill looked as aghast as was possible for a person of his complexion.

"That's the worst news I have heard yet. How can you treat us so cruelly?" he said gallantly. "You come over and break all our hearts, and then off you go, and leave us to mend them as best we can."

"I hope it is not as bad as all that," I said, with a sickly smile. "I won't say good-bye to you now; I am sure I shall see you again before I go—perhaps at Miss Burke's to-morrow." And I rode quickly away, without heeding the farewell words that he shouted after me.

To say the truth, I could not face another good-bye, even with O'Neill, and I trotted home at a good pace along the

muddy road, doing my best to outstrip the associations that every fresh turn in its familiar windings called up.

There was a note for me on the hall table when I arrived.

“Miss Burke left it herself, miss,” said Roche, “and she hopes you’ll send over an answer this afternoon. She wanted to see the masther, but sure he’s not able to see any one—and no wondher, faith, no wondher!”

The note was written on the small coquettish paper, with a golden “Mimi,” engrossed on the corner, which was affected by Miss Burke, and her good-natured, untidy handwriting had sprawled over all four sides of the sheet. She said that she “heard that Willy was gone,” and, without making any further comment, she asked me if I would come and stay with them for as long or as short a time as I might wish.

She hoped I would come to-morrow, if possible, as it was their "at home" day, and I might meet a few friends; and she remained, mine most affectionately, Mary Burke.

I considered the matter. It certainly would be a relief to get away from Durrus and its horrible silence and forsakenness, even for a night or two. To-day was Tuesday; I did not start till Saturday. If I went over to Garden Hill to-morrow afternoon, timing my arrival so as to evade the "few friends," I could stay there till Friday morning. I knew it would make no difference to my uncle; I could tell him about it when I saw him at dinner: and I sent a note telling Miss Burke that I should be very glad to go over to her to-morrow afternoon. But I did not see my uncle at dinner.

"He's not at all well, miss," Roche said

mysteriously. "I was telling him a while ago that 'tis for the docthor he should send ; but indeed, he was for turning me out of the room when I said it."

"Do you think he would like to see me ?"

"Don't go near him at all to-night, miss," Roche answered, with unexpected urgency. "He'll be bettther to-morrow—you'll see him then."

But I did see my uncle again that night. When I went upstairs to bed, I was startled by seeing his tall figure, in his dressing-gown, standing outside the door of the room which Willy had locked. He had a large bunch of keys, and was trying them one after the other in the lock.

"Perhaps you can help me with these," he said, looking round as I came up to him. "I am almost sure that one of these keys opens this door, but I cannot find it."

His hand trembled so much, that the keys were shaking and jingling as he held them out to me.

“I am afraid Willy has got the key——” I began.

“But, my dear, I think it is very probable that we shall find Willy in that room,” he said, in a low confidential voice, pressing the keys upon me. “I cannot think why he remains in there. I have tried several times to-day to open the door, but that fellow Roche keeps pestering me. I believe he is in league with Willy.”

My own hand was trembling almost as much as my uncle's, but I did not dare to refuse to take the keys, and I made a pretence of trying one in the lock. He watched me anxiously for a moment.

“No, my dear, I see it is no use trying to-night. You are tired, and so am I”—he sighed deeply, and put his hand to his

chest,—“this oppression that I am suffering from tries me terribly. I will go to my room and see if I can get a little rest. I need rest sadly.”

“Yes, you look very tired,” I said, in as ordinary a voice as I could manage, handing the keys back to him.

“Do I? Well, to tell you the truth, I have been quite unable to sleep lately. I am so much disturbed by these hackney carmen who make it a practice to drive past the house at all hours of the night; I hope they do not annoy you? I have told them several times to go away, but they simply laugh at me. And the strange thing is,” he continued, leaning over the rail of the corridor and looking suspiciously down into the hall, “that though that tree is still lying across the avenue, it does not stop them in the least—they just drive through it. Well, good night, my dear,” he

said, nodding at me in a friendly way ; “ we must give it up for to-night, but we shall unearth Master Willy to-morrow.”

He nodded again, and walked away down the corridor.





CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH THE FRENCH WINDOW.

“Remorse she ne’er forsakes us ;
A bloodhound staunch, she tracks our rapid step.”

“A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes and beckoning shadows dire.”

WHEN Maggie came into my room next morning, she told me that Dr. Kelly had been sent for.

“The masther was very bad all the night, and it wasn’t daylight when Mистер Roche come down and said Mick should go for the docthor.”

I dressed as quickly as I could, and,

when I came downstairs, found that Dr. Kelly was already with my uncle. I rang the bell, and, after an unusual delay, Roche answered it.

“ You had better ask Dr. Kelly to come in to breakfast,” I said.

“ Very well, miss ; he’ll be going now in a minute. He’s with the masther in the little study.”

“ In the little study ? ”

“ Yes, indeed, miss. At four o’clock this morning he lepped out of his bed, and nothing would do him only to go downstairs ; first he was for going away out of the house down to the bog, or the like o’ that, an’ when I was thrying to stop him, he says, ‘ Let go,’ says he, ‘ Poul-na-coppal is the only place,’ says he ; ‘ we’ll be late if we don’t go now ! ’ and I was put to me thrumps to howld him.”

“ Did you tell Dr. Kelly all this ? ”

“Oh, bedad, I did, miss!” said Roche, with modest pride, “and more too. There he is now in the hall. I’ll go tell him you want to spake to him.”

The little doctor’s vulgar authoritative voice and complacent manner inspired me with a certain confidence in him, though what he said about Uncle Dominick was not very reassuring.

“It’s hard enough to say how it’ll go with him,” he said, sitting down opposite to me at the breakfast-table. “Yes, thank you, I take three lumps; I’ve a very sweet tooth. Of course, he’s not as young as he was, y’ know; it’s a nasty attack, and his constitution’s greatly pulled down since I saw him last.”

Beyond this he did not seem inclined to give an opinion, and began to tell me about some Shakespeare recitations, in which, it appeared, he was to take a

prominent part. But I reverted to the subject of my uncle's illness at the first opportunity.

"Oh, never fear, he'll pull round; but we'll have to be very careful of him," he said, hurrying through his breakfast with practised rapidity.

"He was wandering in his head last night," I said tentatively.

"Oh, I know that, I know that," he replied, rubbing his truculent red moustache violently with his napkin; "Roche told me all about that."

"Because," I went on, "if you thought there was anything serious, I would not go over to Garden Hill to-day. Miss Burke asked me to spend a few days with her," I explained.

"Well, why not?" broke in Dr. Kelly, brusquely. "Now, if you don't mind me telling you so, it would be the best thing

you could do"—screwing up one small intelligent eye and looking at me observantly. "You just want a little change, and Roche is well able to mind your uncle"—he gave his tea-cup a swing to collect what remained of the three lumps before swallowing its contents. "Well, I must be off now. I'll be at Miss Burke's meself this afternoon, and I'll call in here again on my way home. Good morning."

Roche was waiting in the hall, and I heard Dr. Kelly's last words.

"Mind, now, you keep a good eye on him. I'll send over the medicine."

Up to this I had not been able to examine the contents of the post-bag, and I now went over to the sideboard and shook them out. There was nothing in it but a circular or two, and a small flat parcel. I turned over the latter, and saw with a start my own name in Willy's cramped

boyish handwriting. Cutting the string quickly, I found inside another wrapping of paper, carefully tied up, and sealed with his well-remembered signet-ring. Under the string a half-sheet of note-paper, folded in two, had been slipped. There were only a very few words written in pencil on it.

“I think you have a right to this, and some day I would like you to see it, but please don’t open it till my father is dead. Yours ever, W.”

I turned the parcel over and over. It felt like a book with a soft cover; but why Willy, of all people in the world, should send me a book, and what it could have to say to Uncle Dominick was more than I could fathom.

It was no use trying to think about it. Everything lately had gone beyond my powers of comprehension. I was sick of

conjectures, and exhausted by unexplainable disasters. I would not let myself think of Willy; it did not bear thinking of, that he was now turning his back on his own home, for no apparent reason, except the contradictory one that he had married, contrary to his father's wishes, a girl whom he did not love. One comfort was, that I also was soon to leave Durrus behind me, and in my case it would certainly be for ever. Even if Uncle Dominick had meant anything by his threat of leaving me his property, it did not make any difference to me. Nothing would induce me to have anything to say to it. Willy would have to come home and take possession when the time came, and I would go on living my peaceful uneventful life in the house in Charles Street with Aunt Jane. That was what it was going to be, I deter-

mined—a placid, unexciting existence ; an occasional classical concert ; a literary tea or two ; no more dances or frivolities—I had in the last two or three months grown too old for them.

I went up to my room and began to get through some preliminary packing before lunch, and as with a heavy heart I folded up and laid in my trunk the dresses which I had bought in Boston with such pleasant anticipations, Aunt Jane's words came back to me with humiliating force—"I trust you will not have cause to regret the headstrong self-will which has made you unable to content yourself in a quiet and God-fearing household."

The morning went quickly by, and, when I had finished packing, I sat down by the window with an aching back and a hot head, but nevertheless with satisfaction in the thought that the big trunk

which I had just filled and locked need not be opened again until it had once more taken up its quarters in the house in Charles Street. Some irrational sentiment had made me defer the packing of my habit till the last moment, and when I did at last lay it on the top of my dresses, I slipped the parcel Willy had sent me into its folds.

I raised the window, and looked out into the mild still air. By this time next week, Willy and I would both be on the sea, being carried to opposite ends of the earth, without anything to connect us for the future, except this parcel, which he had forbidden me to open. It seemed to me, as I looked out at the woods of Durrus, the place that I was so fond of, and that yet I almost hated, that it was a true saying—

“Life is a tale told by an idiot, . . .
. . . signifying nothing.”

The sky was dark and sullen, with layers of overlapping clouds roofing it down to the horizon, and on the lonely sea-stretches there was not so much as a fishing-boat to be seen. The place was unusually deserted, and in nothing was Willy's absence more clearly shown than in the fact that the fallen sycamore was still lying across the bend of the avenue, no attempt having even been made to cut away the branches. I looked away from it with a shudder, remembering Uncle Dominick's dreadful confidences about it the night before, and I wondered how I should summon up courage enough to go into his room to say good-bye to him. It seemed unnatural to leave him when he was ill; but I knew very well that I could be of no real use to him, and the mere thought of another scene such as that of last night actually made my blood run cold.

A sound of the snapping of twigs made me again look in the direction of the fallen tree, and I saw that a woman, whom I soon recognized as being Moll Hourihane, was breaking away some of the smaller branches, and making them into a bundle for firewood. It was the first time I had ever seen her occupy herself rationally, or that I had been able to watch her in unobserved security, and my eyes followed her movements with a fascinated curiosity as she made herself a large bundle, and, having hoisted it on to her back with surprising ease, crossed the grass between the house and the drive, and walked along close under the windows until she reached the end one, which was the French window of my uncle's study. She stood for a moment or two outside, looking in, and then drew her hand once or twice down the glass.

I had leaned as far out of my window as was possible, and I now called out to her, "Go away! You will disturb the master. Go away at once!"

She drew back from the window, and looked up, shading her eyes with her hand, to see where my voice had come from. She soon saw me, and I again motioned to her to go away. Instead, however, of doing so, she stood quite still, and, throwing back her head, she fell into a sort of paroxysm of voiceless laughter, pointing at me, and rolling her head from shoulder to shoulder. Seeing that she paid no attention to what I said to her, I was on the point of leaving the window to go and look for Roche, when the French window was opened, and Roche himself came out, and with a torrent of abuse, delivered in [voluble Irish, he drove her away.

"The divil's cure to her!" I heard him

say to himself as she retreated, "coming frightening the masther like that!"

"Roche," I called, "how is the master?"

"Oh, a dale betther, miss," he replied, coming under my window. "He was quite aisy till that owld one came with her ugly face at the window. But sure you can see him to-day before you go; he's quite composed in his mind. He was asking for yourself just now."

In order to be quite sure of missing most of Miss Burke's friends, I had not ordered the trap till half-past four, and I put off going to see Uncle Dominick until about a quarter of an hour before the time I was to start. At the door of his study I met Roche coming out.

"Go in, miss; he's getting on first-class. I'll have a cup of tay ready for you agin you're coming out," he said, opening the door for me.

My uncle was standing by the window, with a book in his hand. He gave a quick glance at me as I came in.

“Yes, they are capital prints,” he said, as if in continuance of a conversation. “I am glad you have come. There is very little light left; but if you will come to the window, I will show them to you.”

He had on the long Paisley shawl dressing-gown which he had worn the night before; his figure looked immensely tall against the dull light; and his high bowed shoulders, with his head sunk on his chest, gave him the appearance of some forlorn sick raven.

“I have come to say good-bye to you for a day or two,” I said, going over to the window. “I am going over to the Burkes’.”

“Well, you will have time to look at this book before you go,” he answered,

turning over its leaves with a sort of suppressed eagerness. "This now, do you remember showing me this?" He held the book towards me, and I saw that it was the old volume of "The Turf, the Chase, and the Road," which my father had given him, and he and I had once before looked over together. "That is a long time ago now."

"Yes," I replied, glad to find that he was so easy to talk to; "I can hardly believe that it is only three months since I came."

He looked fearfully ill and wasted; he was shaking from head to foot, and his restless, bloodshot eyes kept wandering from the book to the trees outside. Whatever Dr. Kelly might say, I was certain that he was much worse than he had even been last night. I could not pretend to myself that I was fond of him; but after

all, now that Willy was gone, I was practically the only relation he had left in the world, and I felt more and more that it would be heartless of me to go away and leave him in such a state.

He did not appear to notice what I had said, and I went on—

“I don’t really care about going to the Burkes’ in the least, Uncle Dominick. I would quite as soon stay with you, if you would like me to.”

“Stay with me! What do you mean?” he said, with some surprise, slipping the book into the wide pocket of his dressing-gown. “You only came last night—or was it the night before?—and, of course, you must stay. You will have to attend the old man’s funeral. You know”—with a low laugh—“they all think that you were buried in Cork; but you’re not, you know—you’re not.”

He had laid his trembling hand on my wrist to emphasize what he said, and I was afraid to move.

“No, do not go,” he went on, his voice getting more and more hurried. “I want you to see about that fallen tree. They cannot possibly get the hearse up to the door while it is there. Why are you looking so frightened, Owen? She is not here. You know, you were very ill when you came, and I *had* to get her to look after you. She was looking in through the window a little time ago; but Roche hunted her away, and she can’t do you any harm now.”

I was almost too terrified by this time to be able to conceal my fear; but I said, as calmly as I could—

“I am not afraid of her. I think it is time for me to go now; let me send Roche to you.”

“No, no!” he whispered anxiously, clutching my wrist more tightly, “he knows nothing about it; he wasn’t here. No one knows but Mary Hourihane, and it was all her fault. Owen!” he cried, his voice rising hysterically, “don’t stare at me! I declare to God I never did anything to you until she came in and asked me to help her to take you—there—out through that window—out to Poul-nacoppal.” He dragged me from the window into the dark corner by the fireplace. “Hide there! Be quick! lest she should see you!” he panted, his teeth chattering, and the perspiration breaking out on his forehead. “I hear her coming. There she is!” fixing frenzied eyes on the wall opposite. “Look at the bog-mould on her hands. She says she did it for my sake! Don’t let her come near me; she will put her arms round my neck, and I shall die!”

He let go my hand, and made a rush to the window. "She is out there too!" he said, with an awful cry, turning back and cowering again in the corner by the fireplace; "and there—and there; she is everywhere! Don't leave me, Owen!"

But his appeal did not stop me in my flight from the room for help.





CHAPTER VIII.

POUL-NA-COPPAL.

“The rose-winged hours that flutter in the van
Of Love’s unquestioning, unrevealed span—
Visions of golden futures; or that last
Wild pageant of the accumulated past
That clangs and flashes for a drowning man.”

“Wenn ich in deine Augen seh
So schwindet all’ mein Leid und Weh.”

I AM not very clear as to what happened next. Mrs. Rourke told me afterwards that I had burst into the kitchen with “a face on me like death,” only able to say, “The master—go to the master!”

After that, I suppose I somehow made

my way to the drawing-room, as I next remember walking to and fro between the window and the fireplace, with a confused feeling that by doing so I should steady my whirling brain.

He had called me "Owen." He had mistaken me, in his madness or delirium, for his dead brother—a mistake which my strong likeness to my father made easy to understand; but neither madness nor delirium could account for all he had said. "You were very ill when you came." "They all think that you're buried in Cork; but you're not, you know!" "I declare to God I never did anything to you." "She asked me to help her to take you—there—out through that window."

What had all this meant? He certainly believed he was speaking to my father. If I could only think it out quietly! What had Moll Hourihane to say to my father,

and what had she done to him that he should be afraid of her?

Then he had spoken of "the old man's funeral"—my grandfather's funeral. How, even in his ravings, could he have forgotten that his brother died two or three days before his father? It was no use; I could not think it out. I must wait until my brain was calmer, till my thoughts had ceased to reel and spin. I was only groping in the dark—in a darkness from whose depths one persistent idea was thrusting itself at me like a sword.

The distant sound of wheels on the drive reminded me that it was past the time at which I was to start for Garden Hill. I hastily resolved to wait and see Dr. Kelly before going there, and I rang the bell in order to send a message to that effect out to the yard. No one answered it for some time, but at length the door opened. I

was standing by the fire, with my elbows on the mantel-shelf and my forehead in my hands, and, hearing a bashful murmur in Maggie's voice, I said, without turning round—

“Tell Tom I shall not want the trap until I send for it.”

The door closed, but footsteps advanced into the room.

“Well, what is it?” I said wearily, taking down my arms.

There was no answer, and, turning round, I found myself face to face with Nugent.

I looked at him stupidly, without taking the hand which he had conventionally held out to me. He drew it back quickly.

“How do you do?” he said very stiffly. “Miss Burke asked me to leave a message for you on my way home. She hopes you do not forget that she expects you this

afternoon. She thought you would have been with her at tea time.

“I could not go,” I answered, without moving.

“Miss Burke desired me to say that you were not to disappoint her,” going on conscientiously with his message, “as Dr. Kelly had told her there was no necessity for your staying with Mr. Sarsfield.”

“My uncle has been much worse. I must wait and see Dr. Kelly.”

My lips were stiff and cold, and I moved them with difficulty. It did not occur to me to ask him to sit down; my only wish was that he should go away while I was still able to keep up the semblance of an ordinary demeanour. He looked at me for a moment.

“I am very sorry to hear that Mr. Sarsfield is worse. Miss Burke had no idea of that when she sent the message.”

“I do not know when I shall be able to go to her. Perhaps never!”

The last words forced themselves out against my will; he must see now that something was wrong. Why did he not go?

“Is there any message I can give Miss Burke for you? If I could be of any use——” he began, less formally than he had hitherto spoken.

“No, thank you; nothing,” I answered, still standing motionless.

There was a brief pause. Nugent glanced at the clock, and then again looked at me. He hesitated for a moment, as if waiting for me to speak; then, finding I did not do so, he picked up his gloves from the table by which he was standing.

“I think I must say good afternoon now,” he said, this time without offering to shake hands with me. “I hope there will

be a better account of your uncle to-morrow before I start. I have only come down for a day about some business."

I did not attempt any reply, and he left the room.

The stress was over, and, after an instant, I wondered why it had been so great. It was a long time now since I had thought myself near breaking my heart about him; when he came in, it had not so much as beaten faster. I had felt stunned, but it was only by the shock of seeing him again at such a moment. Now I assured myself that I was glad he had come and taken my thoughts for a little time from those ghastly ravings of my uncle. Seeing him had been a kind of assurance that things were going on in the usual way, and that I was not living in a nightmare. I was sorry that I had not taken his hand; by not doing so I must have given him a

false impression, and I even wished now that he had stayed longer. In a few minutes I should have lost that feeling of faintness, and have been able to talk naturally to him.

The drawing-room had become very dark. I felt as if I were the only creature alive in the house, and Uncle Dominick's words were again beginning to crowd back with new and insistent suggestion. I would not stay indoors any longer. There was still some daylight, and it would be better to wait outside in the fresh air till Dr. Kelly came.

I walked down the drive till I came to the fallen tree. I was more weak and shaken than I had believed, and I sat down on one of the great limbs that had sprawled along the ground. There was a heavy silence in the air; the sky was low and foreboding, and a watery streak of

yellow lay along the horizon behind the bog. A rook rustled close over my head, with a subdued croak; I watched him flying quietly home to the tall elms by the bog gate. He was still circling round them before settling down, when a sound struck on my ear. I sprang to my feet and listened. It had come from the bog; and now it rose again, a loud, long cry, the cry of a woman keening. Every pulse stood still as I heard it, and I held to a branch of the tree for support, as the wail grew and spread upon the air.

Some one came down the steps of the French window of my uncle's study, and ran across the grass towards me, and I recognized Roche in the twilight.

“Did ye see him?” he called out. “Did he pass this way?”

“Who?” I answered, starting forward.

“The masther—the masther!” he cried,

and then stopped as the keen rose again from the bog. "God save us, what's that? 'Tis from the bog—'twas the bog he was talking of all day! Run, miss, run, for the love of God!"

I hardly waited to hear what he said, but ran for the bog gate as I have never run before or since. The air was full of the crying; the pantings of my breath made it beat in waves in my ears, as I came along under the trees. The gate was wide open, and I could see no one in the gloom ahead of me as I blindly followed the sound along the rough cart track. I strained my eyes in the direction it came from, running all the time, and I soon saw, or thought I saw, against the pale light of the sky, a figure down in the bog to my right. I made for it, stumbling and tripping among the tussocks of heather and grass-grown lumps of peat, once, in my

reckless haste, falling over a great piece of bogwood that stood out of the soft ground. The figure was that of a woman, who was kneeling, keening and wringing her hands, on the farther side of the black Poul-nacoppal, by which I had once seen Moll Hourihane, and, hurrying with what speed I could round its broken, shelving edge, I found that the surging thought which had grown during my run into an unreasoning conviction had been right—the woman was Moll herself.

That she, who was supposed to be unable to utter a sound, should be making this outcry did not then strike me as strange.

“Where is the master?” I said breathlessly. “What are you crying for?”

For all answer, she flung her arms high over her head, and extended them both with a frantic gesture downwards, towards the water, and then fell again to clapping

her hands and beating her breast. At the same moment the irregular fall of footsteps sounded in the road, and I called out with all the strength left to me. At my voice, Moll's crying, which had ceased as I first spoke to her, broke out anew ; but I paid no heed to her, and taking a step forward, peered with a sick terror down at the inky gleam of water in the bog hole. It was quite still, but water was dripping from a plant of bog myrtle that hung out over the edge, and, putting my hand on it, I found it was all wet, as if it had been splashed.

The voices of the men were close to me ; I staggered back to meet them, and sank down on the ground as Tom came up to me.

“ Did you find him, miss ? Is he here ? ”

“ He's there,” I said wildly ; “ ask Moll ! He has killed himself ! ”

My face was turned toward the road,

and as I spoke I saw near me on the dark ground a glimmer of something white that did not look like a stone. I dragged myself towards it. It was a book lying open, a book with pictures, and, dark as it was, I recognized the outlines of one of them, "The Regulator on Hertford Bridge flat."

It was the book which I had seen my uncle put into his pocket. I did not want any more proof of what had happened, and letting the book fall, I covered my face with my hands and lay prone in the heather. Moll's keening had stopped altogether; footsteps hurried past, and I heard excited voices in every direction round me.

"Get ropes and a laddher!"

"Yerrah, what use is that, man? There's twenty foot of mud in the bottom! Go get a boat-hook."

“ ’Twas in here he jumped whatever. Do ye see the marks of his feet ? ”

Then Roche’s voice, in broken explanation—

“ He was cowl’d, and I wasn’t out of the room three minutes getting the hot jar an’ blankets, an’ whin I got back, he was gone out the window ! ”

“ Well ? ” said another voice.

“ I ran to Miss Theo, who was sitting below at the three,” went on Roche ; “ an’ we heard the screeching, an’ we run away down—— ”

“ Where’s Miss Sarsfield now ? ” said the first voice imperatively.

I knew the voice now ; the ground rocked and heaved under me, flashes came and went before my eyes, and for an instant the voices and everything else melted away from me.

When my senses came back to me, I

felt that I was being lifted and carried in some one's arms, but by whom I did not know.

"Put me down," I murmured; "I am able to walk."

I was placed gently on my feet.

"All right now; I'll take Miss Sarsfield home," said Nugent's voice: "go back and help Dr. Kelly. Can you come on now?" he asked, "we are not far from the gate, and my trap is close to it."

I tried to answer him, but my voice was almost gone, and my knees shook under me when I made a step forward. He put his arm round me without a word, and, supported by it, I managed to get as far as the bog gate, but there my strength failed me.

"I am afraid I cannot go any farther," I said, tottering to the low bank beside the road, and sinking down on it. "Please don't trouble about me."

He sat down beside me, and, putting his arm round me again, drew my head down on to his shoulder.

“Why did you send me away from you?” he said, bending his face close to mine.

“I don’t know,” I whispered, trembling.

“Must I go away now, my darling?”

I said nothing, but in the soft darkness his lips met mine, and in a moment all the grief and horror of the last week slipped away from me—everything was lost in the long forgetfulness of a kiss.





CHAPTER IX.

A HERITAGE OF WOE.

“Love that was dead and buried, yesterday
Out of his grave rose up before my face.”

“Not by appointment do we meet delight and joy—
They heed not our expectancy;
But, at some turning in the walks of life,
They on a sudden clasp us with a smile.”

It was Friday afternoon, two days since the evening when Nugent had driven me away from Durrus to Garden Hill. The sun was shining into Miss Burke's drawing-room, and through the window I caught occasional glimpses of Miss Burke herself in her garden, examining the hotbed,

standing with arms akimbo to direct the operations of the garden boy, or ejecting an errant Plymouth Rock, that had daringly flown over the fuchsia hedge into the garden from the yard.

“Do you remember that afternoon when you said good-bye to Willy out there?” I said, looking round at Nugent, as Miss Burke slammed the garden gate on the intruder. “I was there by the henhouse all the time.”

“Yes, I knew you were—I was watching you out of the window while I was being talked to by Miss Croly.”

“Then why did you say what you did about America to Willy? You must have known I could hear.”

“I wanted you to hear. I thought then that you had treated me very badly. In fact, I am not at all sure that I don’t think so still.”

I left the window in which we were standing, and went back to the armchair which Mrs. Barrett had once so abundantly filled.

“I want to ask you something,” I said ; “what was it—why—I mean, what made you write me that letter ?”

“Because, under the circumstances, it was about the only thing for me to do”—in a tone which told of past indignation. “I was warned off!”

“I never warned you,” I said, trying to appear absorbed in studying the figures on the Japanese screen that I was holding.

“No, I dare say you did not; but it came to pretty nearly the same thing when you got your uncle to do it for you.”

“I! I never did anything of the kind!”

“But your uncle himself told me——” he began, and stopped.

“Told you what?” I said, sitting bolt upright.

“Well,” he answered reluctantly, “that last day I was at Durrus—after the ball, you know—your uncle sent for me, and he told me you were engaged to Willy.”

“I engaged to Willy!” I cried hotly. “How could he have——”

The words died on my lips; I could not now dispute about anything Uncle Dominick had said.

“He said more than that,” said Nugent, coming and standing over me; “he said he thought—he was pretty sure, in fact—that you wanted me to know it” (reddening at the recollection), “and so then, of course——”

It was a hard thing to hear. The falsehood had come near spoiling both our lives, and with the thought of it the remembrance of the time that was over

came like a wave about me—the wretchedness and bewilderment, the heart-ache and the hidden strivings with it, the effort for Willy's sake. I looked up into the troubled blue eyes that were fixed on mine, and, with such a reaction from pain as comes seldom in a life, I stretched out both my hands.

“Oh, Nugent,” I said, calling him by his name for the first time, “why did you believe it?”

He took hold of my hands, and knelt down beside me. “I think,” he said, in a low voice, “because I loved you so much.”

I could not now say more than this, even to Nugent. Uncle Dominick had only been buried this morning, and all that had happened that last afternoon was still fresh in my mind. They had recovered his body from the bog hole the same night, after

long searching, and a telegram had been sent to try and catch Willy before he started. But it had been too late; he and Anstey had sailed for Melbourne a few hours before the telegram had gone, and now a second message had been sent to Melbourne to await his arrival there. There had been very few at the funeral, Nugent said; he and his father, and old Mr. McCarthy, the solicitor, and Dr. Kelly, who had conducted the inquest, were, with the Durrus servants, the only people there.

“They went by the old road across the bog,” he said, in answer to a question from me. “It was a lovely morning, just like spring. I looked at Poul-na-coppal as we walked past, and you can see at once that something unusual has happened there. The banks are all muddy and trampled, and the heather and bog myrtle that used

to grow round it are torn and broken down. You wouldn't know it."

"Not know Poul-na-coppal! I wish I could think I should ever forget it."

"They had had the mausoleum opened," Nugent went on. "I can just remember seeing it open before, when I was six years old, and they took me to old Theodore's funeral—by way of a treat. It's an awful old place."

"Oh, Nugent," I said, "was Moll Hourihane there?"

"No, I hear she has gone off her head altogether, and just sits by the fire and says 'Gibber' all the time—or words to that effect."

"Nonsense!"

"Well, that is what your friend Tom told me. I was quite glad to hear that she was turning into a good conventional idiot, after all."

“ Was old Brian there ? ”

“ Yes ; he had the cheek to ask me if I knew who was to get the property. He is as ill-conditioned an old ruffian as I ever saw. I told him that till the will was read, no one knew anything about it.”

“ I hope your father went up to the house to hear it,” I said, with an uneasy recollection of my uncle’s threat to disinherit Willy in my favour.

“ I have not the least doubt he did—in fact, I believe McCarthy asked him to do so ; but as I knew it could be of no special interest to any one but Willy, I came right on here. It seemed to me as if I would prefer it.”

Miss Mimi’s gardening occupied her till nearly tea time ; at least it was not till then that we heard her voice reverberating in the hall.

“See now, Joanna, be sure and put plenty of butter on the toast, and don’t wet the tea till I ring the bell. The mistress and Miss Bessie will be home from Moycullen soon, and”—in a lower voice—“there’s Miss Sarsfield and Mr. O’Neill in the drawing-room.”

Here there came a ring at the bell.

“Mercy on us! who’s this?” exclaimed Miss Burke; “and me in me awful old gardening clothes!”

We heard her hastily retreat into the room opposite, and then, in a muffled voice, issue her directions.

“Say I’m not at home, Joanna, and Miss Sarsfield’s not able to see *any* one!”

“Good woman,” murmured Nugent.

The door was opened, and Joanna’s steadfast assertions that “all the ladies were out of home,” were reassuringly audible; but the next instant we heard

Miss Mimi emerge from her refuge, and shamelessly betray her confederate.

“Don’t mind Joanna, O’Neill! Come in, come in! I never thought it was you!”

“How do you do, Miss Burke?” said O’Neill; “I am glad you are not as inhospitable as Joanna!” Here followed an apologetic giggle from Joanna, and O’Neill continued. “And how is your guest? Better, I hope.”

“Oh, the poor child! She was awfully bad yesterday; she never lifted her head from the pillow all day. I think some one was gréatly disappointed when he came to inquire! But come in and see her; she’s in the drawing-room.”

O’Neill’s manner when he came in, was, I at once felt, somewhat shorn of its usual intimate devotedness, and I discerned in it a certain striving after a paternal tone.

He shook my hand with a pressure and a shake of his head, that were meant to convey at once a facetious reproach and forgiving congratulation, and as soon as possible took advantage of the cover afforded to him by Miss Burke's appropriate witticisms, and, after a word or two, left my side. Miss Mimi's exuberant enthusiasm soon became a trifle wearying to the objects of it, and although O'Neill gallantly seconded her, I think he was as glad as either Nugent or I when the return of Mrs. Burke and Miss Bessie, and the arrival of tea, caused a diversion.

Soon afterwards, however, he again came up to where I was sitting.

"I want to say a word or two to you, my dear Miss Theo," he said. I guessed that they would be on the subject which I most dreaded, but which was, I knew, inevitable. "It is about that sad business,"

he went on, drawing his chair up to mine ; “ very deplorable it has all been—very shocking--and so trying for you ! And how fortunate that Nugent turned back that evening with Kelly ! He says he scarcely knows why he did ; but I dare say it is not impossible to imagine his reason ! ”—with a temporary relapse from the paternal tone. “ However, what I wanted to say to you was this ; when your uncle’s papers were searched to-day, two wills were found, one of comparatively old standing, in Willy’s favour, and the other—well, you can hardly call it a will—was dated only a few days ago—the first of this month,—it was quite incomplete, neither finished nor signed, but in it it was clear that his intention had been to leave everything he possessed to you. Unluckily, for want of the signature, it is perfectly valueless—— ” He broke off, and stuck his eye-

glass into his eye in order to observe me more intently.

“I am very glad,” I said in a low voice. “I would not have taken it.”

“Well, you see, it was only to be expected that he should want to punish Willy for that outrageous marriage of his. Upon my word, I should have done the same if Nugent had done anything of the kind—or, I may say, if he hadn’t done precisely what he *has* done!”

I paid no attention to O’Neill’s implied compliment.

“Poor Willy!” I said, more to myself than to him; “no matter what the will had been, I would never have taken what ought to have been his.”

“Ah! that’s all very nice and kind and romantic,” said O’Neill, wagging his head sapiently, “but you ought to remember that your father was the eldest son, and

that it was only by what you might call a fluke that he did not inherit. I always thought that it was a wonderful stroke of luck for Dominick, old Theodore's outliving your father. Why, if Owen had held out a couple of days longer, Durrus would be yours this minute! It certainly was an iniquitous thing," he went on, in a wheezy, indignant whisper, "that your grandfather never took the trouble to find out anything about Owen—where he was, if he was married and had any children, and all that kind of thing. But not a bit of it! If Owen survived him, well and good, he got the property; but if he didn't, Dominick was to have it—no reference made to Owen's possible heirs—nothing! Upon my soul, it puts me in a passion whenever I think of it!"

O'Neill pulled out his handkerchief, and began to polish his heated countenance.

I did not answer. While he was speaking, that idea which had haunted me since my last meeting with my uncle again thrust itself into my mind, and I began to feel that there might have been a motive for such a tragedy as had been shadowed in his ravings. I could not sit here with those loud, cheerful voices round me, and O'Neill's red, interested face opposite to me. I knew he was expecting me to speak, but I could not find words to do so. It was vain to look to Nugent to interpose, as he was with difficulty holding his own against the combined assault of Mrs. Burke and her two daughters, who were delightedly making him the occasion to parade venerable jests that had seen hard service in many a previous engagement.

“It was a funny thing now, Willy's marrying that girl. D'ye know had he

any notion of his father's intentions?" began O'Neill again, hitching his chair still closer to mine with the evident intention of starting a long and satisfactory discussion.

I had been rapidly forming various schemes of escape, but I was spared having to carry out any of them by the timely intervention of Joanna, who at this juncture appeared at the door and announced that "Misther Roche had brought over Miss Sarsfield's luggages from Durrus, and would be thankful to speak to her in the hall."

As I crossed the room, Nugent followed me.

"What's the matter?" he whispered. "You look regularly tired out."

"I am going to speak to Roche," I answered. "Will you come with me?"

The first object that I saw in the hall

was the Saratoga trunk which I had packed for America, and my other luggage was blocking up the narrow passage. The sight of the big trunk recalled to me the day that I had packed it, and a sudden thought of Willy's parcel came to me. He had said that I was not to open it till after his father's death, but that then, for his own sake, he would like me to see it. Perhaps it would throw some light on all these mysteries that had thickened round me since I had made the experiment of this visit to Ireland. I could hardly wait to talk to poor old Roche, and to listen to his lamentations over the downfall of the Durrus family. I was burning to open my trunk and see what must be, as far as Willy was concerned, the final word on the subject. At last Roche had said all he had to say. I sent him down to the kitchen to have a consolatory cup of tea with Joanna,

and then, with Nugent's help, I eagerly unbuckled the heavy straps and unlocked my trunk. There, on the top of all, lay my habit, and, with a very shaking hand, I drew out of its folds the little brown paper parcel.

We took it into the dining-room, where we should be free from interruption.

"Will you open it?" I said, sitting down by the table, and trying to prepare myself for whatever fresh revelation was coming.

Nugent cut the string and took the paper off.

"It's a book of some kind," he said, sitting down beside me. "It looks like a diary. And here is a letter for you, from Willy, I suppose."

"Give it to me," I said breathlessly. "And will you see what the book is about?"

The letter was a long one, and was written from Foley's Hotel, Cork.

"Tuesday afternoon, February 2nd.

"MY DEAR THEO" (it began),

"I found this book in the room next yours the morning I went to nail up the door. When I went down after that to the lodge to abuse Brian about letting Moll up to the house, he threatened me in what I thought a queer way. While I was there Moll came in, and when she saw me, she tried to hide a book she had in her hand. I just saw the cover of it, and I knew it was the one I had picked up that morning and left down in my own room. I took it from her, and when I was coming home I looked at it. Then I knew right enough what old Brian had been driving at. You'll see for yourself when you read it.

“All the same, I know now that the biggest part of the fault was Moll’s, though that time I didn’t think so. Anyhow, I knew that my father had swindled you, and that if what I thought was true, I hadn’t a right even to speak to you; and I thought the only way out of it was to do what I knew would make the governor leave the property away from me. Besides, Brian knew, and he told me plain enough, that if I did not do what he wanted, he would disgrace my father and all the family. But I wouldn’t have minded that so much only for the thought of its being your father, and thinking that it was mine who had robbed him, and worse. But, as I told you before, it was really Moll who did it. She thought she’d square things for the governor, and that then, maybe, he’d marry her. He told me that himself. She was so sold then when he wouldn’t do

it, that it, and everything else, sent her off her head. That room she used to be in was your father's, and I hear now she used to be playing there all the time with the little book. I suppose she knew somehow that it was his, and the servants never noticed one way or the other.

“I will never forget what you did for me. I was very near shooting myself that afternoon after you were talking to me in the plantation, but I thought that would only make it worse for you.

“This is the longest letter I ever wrote, and now I have no more to tell you. We will be starting for London directly, and we sail to-morrow. Maybe before you open this you will have heard from me again. Anyhow, don't forget me.

“WILLY.

“P.S.—You see now that you're bound to take the property.”



CHAPTER X.

LEX TALIONIS.

“And now Love sang; but his was such a song,
So meshed with half-remembrance hard to free.”

THE tears crept to my eyes, and, standing there unshed, blurred the closely written lines, as I read them, and heard in every sentence Willy's voice telling me the miserable story. Nugent was still turning over the leaves of the book when I finished the letter.

“I can't make this out,” he said. “It is a diary of your father's for the year 185—, and the curious thing is that it seems from it that he died at Durrus instead of in Cork.”

“Here,” I said helplessly, handing him the letter, “read this, and tell me what it all means.”

He put the diary into my hand, but half drew it back again.

“You ought not to look at it,” he said. “You’re not fit to stand all this trouble.”

“I must see it,” I said agitatedly. “Don’t stop me, Nugent.”

He still held my hand, with the book in it.

“Listen!” I said in a whisper. “I have something to tell you.”

I had been burdened longer than I could bear with the dread of the possible meaning of those strange things that my uncle had said in his delirium, and now by the light of Willy’s letter, all these broken sentences were beginning to shape and group themselves into something that could be understood. I did not wait to think, or to try

and arrange coherently what I was going to say, but with a feeling of feverish hurry driving me, I told Nugent everything that I could think of that bore in any way on my father's death. It was not easy to tell, and towards the end of my story my voice began to fail me.

"Never mind, my darling," he said, putting his arm close round me, "don't think of it any more."

"I can't think of anything else," I said, unclasping his hand from mine, and putting the letter into it. "Read this."

He read it, and, without speaking, took up the diary again.

"I believe I understand it all now," he said. "There is very little in the diary, but there is enough to make it pretty clear what happened. Do you see here; your father got to Cork on the 9th of January, and instead of dying on that day, as is

said on the brass in the church, he did not even start for Durrus till the 10th. I will read it to you, and you will understand it for yourself.

“*January 9.*—Arrived in Cork. Felt very ill. Wrote to Helen, also to Dominick, telling him to expect me to-morrow. Weather very cold.

“*January 10.*—Felt too ill to leave by early train. Came by the six o'clock instead. Got to Carrickbeg at nine p.m. Did not see any one I knew. Got outside car. Very cold night; snow. Arrived Durrus one a.m. Found that my father had died this afternoon. Feel very ill myself. Am in my old room over hall-door.

“*January 11.*—Did not get up. Fear I have a touch of pleurisy. Wish Helen were here. D. has only once been in to see me, and there seems to be no one to

attend to me. Have asked the woman to light a fire in my room, but she has not done so. D. tells me she is the only servant in the house. He says the property has been nearly ruined in the famine. Must write to Helen to-morrow about coming here.' "

This was the last entry in the book, and Nugent had some difficulty in reading it, as the writing was weak and the ink had faded. The pages were rubbed and soiled, and the leaves were dog's-eared, but none had been torn out, and, considering its age and the ill-usage it had probably received, the book was in very good condition.

"You see," Nugent said, when he had finished reading, "your father certainly survived your grandfather, and it is very easy to see why your uncle was anxious for people to believe the contrary. He knew your mother was a long way off, and

that there was no one here to ask any inconvenient questions. The famine had made most people leave the country. I believe my father was the only person who made any trouble about it."

"Yes, yes," I said excitedly, remembering my meeting with O'Neill on the way home from Rathbarry; "he said something to me about it once. Go on."

"Well," went on Nugent, with, as I now think, some pride and pleasure in the office of elucidator, "as a matter of fact, your father probably died on the 11th or 12th, and I must say it looks as if there had been some foul play about it. Your uncle's object was of course to settle things so as to be able to assert that your father had died before your grandfather, and had been buried in Cork. I haven't a doubt that he and Moll managed to get his body out through that French window, and that

then they carried it between them to Poul-na-coppal, and put it in there, where they knew it would never be found or thought of."

"Oh, that explains——" I began; but Nugent was now too interested in what he was saying to stop.

"Of course, he *may* have died naturally, but I am bound to say I don't think he did. I should say that that old madwoman was quite capable, then, of putting a pillow over a sick man's face, if she had any reason for doing so——"

"Stop!" I cried, interrupting him. "I remember now that I thought she wanted to do that very thing to me, the night she came into my room."

Nugent's clear exposition broke down.

"My darling," he said, catching me in his arms again, "I don't know how you ever lived through that awful time, all

alone, with no one to stand by you ; and to think that if I hadn't been fool enough to believe that old blackguard—— ”

“ Don't say anything against him,” I said, rather indistinctly, by reason of my face being hidden in the collar of his coat. “ It's all over now, and I shouldn't mind anything—only for poor Willy. You must write to him. Tell him that nothing would ever induce me to have Durrus, if it was mine fifty times over ; tell him that for my sake he must abide by his father's will, and not waken up a thing that is over now and done with ; tell him that I beg of him to come home again—— ”

“ I'll do nothing of the sort,” said Nugent, lifting my face and looking suspiciously into it. “ I believe you cared a great deal more about Willy than you ever did for me.”

“ I don't know why I didn't,” I answered,

midway between laughter and tears. “He was a thousand times nicer to me than you were—but, somehow, I always liked you best.”

THE END.



